



















REFLECTIONS ON THE  
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA



# REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA

RELIGION, ECOLOGY, DEVELOPMENT

GABRIELE DIETRICH



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# Preface

What follows in these pages is an outcome of my involvement in the Indian women's movement over the past fourteen years. Reflected here are important aspects of my own life, but more so, important issues with which, in different ways, millions of women grapple daily.

Apart from having to earn a living as a college teacher and bringing up two children, now fourteen and eleven, virtually all my time goes directly into the women's movement, be it the weekly meetings at the local level (Pennurimai Iyakkam, Madurai), or be it in interaction with groups in the South or on wider issues at the national level. It is this constant interaction with women of all strata of society, from the rural slum dwellers in Madurai, to fishing women of Trivandrum, and agricultural coolies in North Arcot to activist groups in the big urban centres, which has been the mainstay of my inspiration and support.

There are certain aspects in my life-story which I would like to share with my readers. Before coming to India in January 1972, I had been part of the students' revolt of the sixties in Berlin. This accounts for the Marxist perspective, for my pre-occupation with working class struggles, as well as for basic feminist insights because it was precisely on the class-reductionist understanding of the women's question and on the male-chauvinist notions of the so-called "sexual revolution" that women broke off into autonomous groups in those years. I myself belonged to such a group in Berlin since 1970. After coming to India in 1972, I was told many times over that the women's question was a "Western problem", and at that time, living in Bangalore and researching in Tamil Nadu, I did not find immediate groups to work with—though I could see that among Marxists as well as Gandhians working among agricultural labourers in areas like East Thanjavur, women did struggle for land and against cultural oppression in their own ways in the early seventies.

I had not planned to stay in India for more than two or three years. What overtook me defies my full comprehension up to this

day. It was a matter of falling in love with people, situations, cultural aspects, suffering with them, being thoroughly transformed in the process, striking roots. Much of this is better expressed in my poems and paintings.

My situation changed drastically when I started to work on the faculty of Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary in Madurai, a large provincial town in the heartland of Tamil Nadu. I found myself in an entirely male dominated, Tamil medium, church institution with an overwhelming proportion of male students being trained mostly for rural service as pastors. Though the college itself is known for a relatively progressive stand on social issues, the sheer force of numbers and the very ideology of "being a big family" put women into place in a way which I would have found difficult to imagine myself being part of in my earlier years. The redeeming feature was the freedom one got to do one's own thing. The situation was aggravated by my becoming a mother of children in 1977 and 1981. I faced situations of acute despair and soon noticed that banging my head against a wall daily would only break the head, not the wall.

It was during these years, the late seventies and early eighties, that for sheer survival I started to build extensive links with other women, locally, statewide and nationally. In those years, I first intervened in the conceptual Marxist debate, having to establish an understanding of the need for an autonomous women's movement in the first place.

Another area which I was deeply confronted with were the limitations and potentialities of my physical existence as a woman. Travelling alone extensively, at odd hours and in remote places, I suffered, like all women, the possibility of rape and other violence as a constant threat. Experiencing childbirth as great creativity, I at the same time faced severe physical curtailment of my mobility and other creative potentials due to the demands of children and to impaired health—again a strength and a weakness which I felt I shared with millions of other women. It was this basic experience which encouraged me to go into participatory research on women and primary health education with agricultural labourers.

A word of explanation may also be needed on my approach to religion. For better or for worse, I come from a family in which religion was a non-issue for generations. My maternal grandmother, a rural woman turned urban refugee, lost any religious convictions as a widow of the First World War, and whether my paternal grandmother ever had any, never transpired.



Post-War Berlin was one of the most secular cities in the world, and for a long time I literally did not know anyone who ever went to church on Sundays or even at Christmas or Easter. I turned to Christianity at the age of about twelve, overcoming the isolation of a broken family, devoid of wider humanist values. The fact that apart from Communism, the mainstay of the resistance against fascism had been church-inspired played an important role here. However, I could not bear the church as an institution and therefore turned to history of religions in my higher studies. I have often felt close to Simone Weil who felt too secular to enter the church but was religious enough to be a mystic. I have equal access to people who are 'religiously colour blind' or who turn anti-religious for humanist reasons, and to people who in all simplicity and with an elementary conviction, worship in a village shrine. While I suffer from institutionalised religion immensely and daily, I also have to acknowledge that it was through a very traditional religious institution that I first got access to questions of faith and spirituality which had a liberating dimension for me later on.

Since I have lived in a Christian institution, part of my religious self-expression has taken the shape of Christian theological reflection. At the same time, not having been hampered by caste, sect, bonds of kinship, I often have very spontaneous access to Hindu symbols and contents as they come my way. Even while this is so, my conscience is sharpened constantly by the outcry of women who want to discard religion as an oppressive ideology altogether, and by the struggle of Dalits who feel they have to confront Hinduism as a whole. I also feel deep empathy for many Muslim women who want to organise among themselves in order to dismantle their own cultural oppression. I am deeply convinced that what unites all of us is the struggle against communalism and religious chauvinism which is one of the acutest dangers in our national political process as a whole.

It was as an aftermath of the Shah Bano judgement of the Supreme Court that we had, for the first time, an extended debate on religion and secularism in the women's movement. We are united in the quest for a secular, gender-just family law but divided on the question of how to get there and what stand to take on religion and culture. While these debates are important, overcoming the barriers of caste and creed, affirming humanist-feminist values within and outside religions has to happen in our day-to-day work with women at the local level, where unity is often more

difficult to build. My contention is that despite being sharpened by the alienations of caste, class and patriarchy, religion, like art, is also a field in which the human capacity for transcendence and transformation is expressed in a symbolic way and that, therefore, religious resources need to be explored and transformed from a women-centered popular perspective. The struggle against communalism needs to be fought from outside as well as from within religious communities.

A final observation on the relationship between patriarchy and class, and between 'autonomous' and 'mixed' organisations may be in order. As mentioned above, the attempt to keep women's struggles and class struggles together does have a certain biographical background in my case. However, I feel that the integration of both these aspects has been carried forward rapidly, and with encouraging results, in India over the last few years. Many activists in the women's movement have had a background of involvement in class-oriented organisations and have deepened their feminist perceptions in autonomous groups over a number of years. At the same time, under the impact of the women's movement, many class-organisations are forced to deepen their understanding of patriarchy, and can no longer take the mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of male activists for granted as 'willing supporters' of their unquestioned cause.

Class-based mass organisations in places like Assam and Bihar also pose a challenge to the women's movement by the sheer mass of women they mobilise and the causes they take up. Today it can be said that the attempt to integrate women's movements and class-based mass movements is taking shape in many places all over the country. The Patna Conference in 1988 was such an attempt to bring women from 'mixed' class based organisations and 'autonomous' women together. It tried to work out patriarchy as a category, related to class but not reducible to it, autonomous, yet related.

Again, while these terms may sound highly abstract, one has to keep in mind that they have a bearing on how women organise and how we relate to unions, slum dwellers' movements, ecological groups, parties, and many other forms of organisation. Looking back, I think it is correct to say that many of us in the women's movement have become both more class conscious (*i.e.* oriented toward the mass of rural and urban poor women) and more feminist, *i.e.* more determined to tackle women's issues like rape, violence, access to property, housing, work, equal wages, gender-



just division of labour, health and production of life rights, sexuality, cultural and religious values in a direct way, not having them subordinated to 'larger causes' like 'the revolution', 'peace and ecology', and 'religious freedom'. We have started to understand patriarchy, with its sexual division of labour and sexual violence, as one of the root causes of class and caste society, militarism and ecological disaster.

I am indebted to the experiences, initiatives, fears, tears and laughter, dreams, thoughts, love and struggles of a countless number of women. Yet, I would like to mention a few people, not because they have contributed more than others, but because they stand for causes which represent many others who cannot all be mentioned. In terms of organisational work, I have been greatly inspired by Gita Ramakrishna of the Tamil Nadu State Construction Workers Union and Pennurimai Iyakkam, Madras. Nalini Nayak and her work with the fishing community in Trivandrum, Ruth Manorama and her work with slum dwellers and Women's Voice in Bangalore, Ilina Sen and her work with women mine workers in Dalli Rajhara, and Burnad Fatima and the women of the Rural Women's Liberation Movement in Arkonam, and R. Shenbagavalli, my colleague in our work with slum women in Madurai.

In the attempt to carry on theoretical reflections on practical involvements and in trying to arrive at fresh insights and conceptualisations, I owe a lot to friends like Nandita Gandhi, Chhaya Datar, Vibhuti Patel, Bina Agarwal, Gail Omvedt, Parita Mukta, Aruna Gnanadasan and many more. Among the men who have been consistently supportive and willing to change their own perceptions, sometimes beyond recognition, I would like to mention M.M. Thomas, under whom I worked at CISRS, Bangalore, from 1972-1975, who I consider my guru, and to whom I owe more than I can express here. Also, Dilip Kamat, trade unionist and ecologist in Belgaum, comrade Ajit Roy of *The Marxist Review*, Calcutta, and my colleagues, Dhyanchand Carr and David Rajendran. Last but not least, I would like to mention my family, which has sustained me immensely.

Some of the essays here have been published earlier by *Breakthrough* (Bangalore), and acknowledgements are also due to the *Marxist Review*, *Shakti* (Bombay), *Economic and Political Weekly* and the *Lokayan Bulletin*.





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For Rajini Rajasingham of Jaffna University, Sri Lanka

Murdered on 21 September 1989 for being a consistent human rights activist

## VOICES FROM THE KILLING FIELDS

They have tried  
to make you  
another  
dead body  
in the  
daily count  
of twenty  
or forty

So motivated  
they were  
they broke  
their ceasefire  
to tick you off  
on the hitlist

The long oval  
of your face  
with eyes  
sparkling fire  
was with me  
this night

Your eloquent

hands  
your emphatic  
voice  
the seashells  
speaking  
of life's beauty  
in all shapes  
and colours  
from pink  
to mother of pearl

We will affirm  
the preciousness  
of life

No more  
atrocities  
not even  
our own  
there must be  
an end  
to slaughter

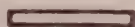
They can

bump off  
a few of us  
but not all  
if we are  
many  
you paid  
the price  
for nurturing  
fearlessness  
in all of us

The shots fell  
on Jaffna Peninsula  
the fourth week

of September  
when Pol Pot  
rekindled  
the fire  
of civil war  
in Campuchea

But your voice  
rings out  
to raise  
the skeletons  
from the  
killing fields  
of your island



# 1 The Secular State, Freedom of Religion and Women's Rights

I would like to explore here some aspects of the Indian constitution which affect millions of people in their day to day lives but which are not usually taken as being spectacular enough to arouse much interest. I would like to look at the problem of the secular state, rising communalism in daily life and in the political processes, the question of freedom of religion and the impingement on women's rights by the guarantee of freedom of religion. I am choosing this area for two immediate reasons. As a person working in a religious institution, I have an interest in freedom of religion. As a women in the women's movement, I am struggling for women's rights. If two basic human rights impinge on each other, it becomes necessary to take a stand.

## *Indivisibility of Human Rights and the Constitution*

Before I go into the conflict between religious rights and women's rights, I would like to make a general observation on the question of the state safeguarding basic human rights. It is in the very nature of the state to mediate between the interests of different sections which are contradictory. These differences pertain to differences of class, caste, gender, religion, language, race etc. Even though, under capitalism, the state may in practice represent the interests of the owning classes, may promote upper caste values, and be thoroughly patriarchal, it nevertheless remains essential to defend and broaden the scope of basic human rights guaranteed in the constitution. Human rights violations by the state itself and by coercive forces should not make us cynical but should embolden us to further defend the democratic substance of the constitution.

I would also like to make the general observation that human rights are indivisible. We cannot fight against human rights violations in our own country and at the same time turn a blind eye to human rights violations in other countries. We cannot fight for the



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right to life if we condone that the state or even any liberation struggle takes life at random. This, as the ethnic struggle in Sri Lanka has shown, is a difficult position to arrive at. It has cost many human rights activists their life.

The indivisibility of human rights can, in a most exemplary way, be understood if one studies the post-revolutionary history of Nicaragua. If one reads the speeches of Thomas Borge, the Minister of Home Affairs in Nicaragua, it becomes striking how he stands up for a human rights culture inspired by the Sermon of the Mount. Having fought in an armed struggle for many years, he refuses any compromises on human rights in the post-revolutionary political process. He refused to inflict any torture, leave alone death penalty, on the rapist and murderer of his own wife.

The indivisibility of human rights—'bread and freedom' or 'bread and roses' as the women's movement has put it—asserts itself at crucial moments in history. We are living in such a crucial moment of history where the very survival of humankind is in question because of ecological crisis and military destruction. We are living in a situation where the right to life is threatened not only by the coercive forces of the state, but by state policies and dominant development concepts themselves.

For this reason, some of the crucial campaigns in our country are trying to expand the right to life. For example, the campaign for the Employment Guarantee Scheme is pushing for the right to work as a basic constitutional right. The national campaign for housing rights has gone in a similar direction since it has pointed out that the right to life cannot be safeguarded without the right to livelihood. Shelter close to the workplace is one of the main demands of the alternative housing policy.

There is an attempt to enshrine the right to housing in the constitution. Without making housing a constitutional right, the hard won gains for women which found their way into the draft of the Housing Bill can never be implemented because most religious laws withhold property rights from women. The National Campaign "Protect Waters Protect Life" had to defend the right to life (Art. 21) against the right to profession (Art. 19) since it is business interests protected by the right to profession which are eroding people's access to basic means of survival and natural resources. The hitch, in other words, comes where basic constitutional rights impinge on each other. I would now like to

go into one of the examples of such impingement of basic rights in order to raise the question how the democratic substance of the constitution can be defended and broadened under such circumstances.

### *Women's Rights and Freedom of Religion*

Despite the fact that we have about two and a half crores of women less in our population than men, women's rights are not usually seen as a survival issue. Nevertheless, we have to face the reality that over two crores of women have paid with their very life for the subordinate position assigned to them in society. Of course, the immediate causes for the massive morbidity and mortality of women in our country has to do with ecological destruction and with development concepts which make women more and more marginal to the economy.

However, other factors are blatant increase in violence in the family and in public life which is based on the assumption that women are the property of their family or their husbands. Within the family women can be denied the right to work, the right to property, the right to mobility; they can even be done to death without outside intervention. These extremes of patriarchy are partly customary but are also partly endorsed by the state by upholding religious personal laws. The legal situation is as follows.

Article 14 guarantees any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth. Article 16 safeguards equal opportunity in public employment, and Article 29(2) provides non-discrimination in educational institutions. Communal electorates are ruled out in Article 325. However, the state preserves the right to give special opportunities to backward sections even though this may violate traditional religious views. This accounts for reservations for Dalits, Adivasis, backward castes etc.

The truth is that women have been getting a worse deal from the state than Dalits and Adivasis. While reservations for Dalits and Adivasis are upheld despite the guarantee of individual (Article 25) and collective (Article 26) freedom of religion, women's rights are constantly and systematically violated in the name of freedom of religion. On the contrary, this state of affairs has been aggravated by the Muslim Women's Protection Bill



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which prevents Muslim women from having recourse to Articles 125 and 126 of the Indian Criminal Procedures Code (Maintenance Laws) despite the fact that Article 25 (2 a & b) guarantees that nothing in Article 25 shall prevent the state from applying any existing law regulating or restricting any economic or financial activity associated with religious practice if this is necessary for reasons of social justice.

The personal laws of our country remain regulated by religions, all of which are blatantly unjust to women, depriving them of rights to inheritance, divorce and other forms of self-reliance. This is so despite the fact that in the directive principles of the constitution (No. 41) it is laid down that "the state shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India". Far from proceeding to create a secular family law for all citizens, the Muslim Women Bill of 5 May 1986 has even withheld the protections of Articles 125 and 126 of the Indian Criminal Procedure Code from Muslim women. It has invalidated a criminal law which protects women to please communalist interests.

This blatant violation of women's rights are the direct backlash to the attempt of a divorced Muslim woman of Indore, 72-year-old Shah Bano, seeking maintenance and achieving justice in the highest court of the land. It was this victory of Shah Bano on 23 April 1985 and the unfortunate anti-Muslim polemic in the judgement of justice Chandrachud which led to a highly communalised debate about Muslim personal laws. It was the ensuing communalist polemics which made Shah Bano withdraw from claiming her right, saying on T.V. that she had to do so because she did not want to become the cause of a communal riot. It was in the aftermath of these events that the Muslim Women Protection Bill was pushed through in May 1986.

It appears that we have moved further away from possible implementation of directive principle No. 41 over the decades. The survey on the status of women in India was taking a position of warmly recommending the creation of a uniform civil code. However, at the end of the UN decade, nothing had moved in this direction. The autonomous conference of the women's movement in Bombay in December 1985 had demanded a gender-just, secular family law giving the reason that religion should govern the relationship between the person and God but



not of human beings among each other. This formulation stuck to an individualistic, middle class perception of religion which ignored the problem of religious identity. At the same time it is obvious that an assertion of collective religious identity can often be highly problematic.

Communal blackmail against any attempt to protect women's rights can reach lethal proportions. This became evident in the debate about *sati* and the new *sati* laws which followed the violent death of Roop Kanwar on her husband's funeral pyre in Rajasthan in September 1987. Once again a distinction was made between 'voluntary' *sati* and the forced death of a widow, and it was argued that punishing 'voluntary' *sati* would amount to violation of minority rights. The fanatics among the Rajput community were styling themselves as a persecuted religious minority. It was only by pointing out the complete lack of decision making power in most women's lives and by the sustained campaigning of the women's movement and of human rights activists that the situation could be contained.

However, as a result, the new legislation, worse than the 160-year old colonial law, punishes not only the relatives of a woman on whom *sati* is committed but also the woman herself in case the act of *sati* is being prevented. Any woman caught up in such a situation thus faces the perspective of either death or jail. This is another instance which demonstrated how women's democratic rights are still narrowed down and eroded in the present situation.

Among Christians, there has been a slight success in furthering women's rights in the case of Mary Roy succeeding to strike down the Travancore Christian Women's Succession Act which gave women a share of one-fifth in the family property or Rs. 5,000—whichever is less. However, implementation of women's inheritance rights is vigorously resisted by church leaders, and women trying to insist on their rights face severe social boycott.

While the Travancore Act was valid only in parts of Kerala and was thus easier to strike down, the real difficulty is with the Christian divorce law. The Indian Divorce Act of 1869 allows a man to divorce his wife in the case of adultery or change of religion, while a woman has to prove two violations of marital rights such as incestuous adultery, bigamy or rape apart from adultery. This law makes it nearly impossible for a Christian woman to get a divorce. If she gets legal separation only, she

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faces the problem that the husband can still claim her property, custody over her children, and restitution of conjugal rights.

This blatant violation of Articles 14 and 15 of the constitution does not bother anyone because there is a widespread conviction that women should not ask for a divorce anyway, no matter what extent of torture they have been through. Obviously, to achieve a broadening of democratic rights for women, we have to work for a secular family law. However, such attempts cannot come from the women's movement alone.

A most memorable example of struggle for women's rights from the side of the law givers was the attempt of Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar, then Law Minister, to push through the Hindu Code Bill in 1951 on which a committee called the Hindu Law Committee had been working since 1941. Suddenly, on the eve of the elections, this bill was dropped in 1951 because the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, felt there was too much opposition. Babasahib Ambedkar resigned as Law Minister in protest against massive obstruction in Parliament.

It was only in 1956 and 1976 that some changes were brought into the Hindu Law, but still women did not get equality. There are court judgements which declare that Article 14 (equality) or 21 (right to life and personal liberty) are not applicable within the family since their application will create discord. Nevertheless, attempts to implement the directive principle to work towards a secular civil code meets with the constant battle cry that religion is in danger. It is, therefore, necessary to have a closer look at the problem of religious freedom, secularism and the rise of communalism in our political life.

### *The Rise of Communalism*

The debate on freedom of religion has to be seen in the wider context of the widespread upsurge of communalism, fundamentalism, and religious revivalism which characterises the present situation not only at the national level but also internationally. This upsurge is part of the deep and universal moral crisis which has been triggered off by development models which have been destructive of natural resources, environmental balance and social structures. Consumerism as a substitute for cultural identities has also transformed cultural identities into consumer goods. The strongholds of communalism are not the so-called obscurantist rural masses but the educated unemployed and the merchant



classes in the cities. Revivalist, fundamentalist and communalist forces fill a genuine cultural vacuum but the solutions they offer go along with violence and erosion of human rights, especially of women's rights.

The rise of communalism in India has been less conspicuous and obvious than the rise of fundamentalism and revivalism elsewhere. It is a great irony that secularism was inscribed into the constitution together with socialism, by the forty second amendment in 1976, during the Emergency, when India was declared a "Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic" at a moment when both Nehru's socialist aspirations as well as his secularism were practically thrown overboard. This development remained obscured for some time by the maintenance of socialist and secular rhetoric which went side by side with more and more blatantly capitalist policies and public religious activities of political power holders. Majority communalism became an important device in the electoral process. This has to do with competition of the middle caste-middle class sections for a larger share of the capitalist cake and with the political vacuum created by a more and more technocratic form of capitalism oriented towards foreign models.

Where things had gone wrong became more visible only after the anti-Sikh riots following Indira Gandhi's assassination and in the overtly majority-communalist appeal of the election ads of the Congress-I at that time. Socialism, too, was relegated to a family tradition of the Nehrus during this election campaign and had nearly disappeared at the Congress centenary. Communalism within the ruling party was up to a point obscured by the fact that communalism was more visible among the opposition (e.g. RSS, Jan Sangh, BJP or in regional parties like Telugu Desam, leave alone the explosive situation in the Akali Dal). It has often been pointed out that Indira Gandhi initially encouraged Bhindranwale in order to weaken the Akali Dal. That means secularism had worn extremely thin under the friction of electoral power struggles.

The situation is complicated by the fact that communalism has different forms and expressions. Under Congress rule, a secular appearance was maintained while at the same time the appeal towards majority communalism was often overt and blatant, to the extent of the engineering of communal riots. At the same time, appeasing 'minorities' would take the obscurantist form of



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strengthening the most fundamentalist patriarchal elements, as happened with the Muslim Women Protection Bill.

At the same time, further South, one could find the 'god-man' type of populist, hero-worshipping communalism of N.T. Rama Rao's Telugu Desam, which ironically tried to project a progressive image as far as women are concerned while at the same time perpetrating blatant human rights violations, especially on Dalits, and eroding civil liberties by systematically building up a culture of violence.

Under the consensus politics of the United Front Government the situation had become more complicated. On the one hand, the secular credentials were more intact than those of the Congress Party, strengthened by the alliance with the Left. At the same time, the BJP made it clear that its answer to Mandal (reservation for backward classes) was Mandir (construction of the Ram-temple in Ayodhya) which led to a severe escalation of the communal crisis. Reeling under Punjab, Kashmir and Ayodhya, the government has not gone near the problem of reforming the personal law. It has also not shown any indication of being concerned with women as an underprivileged section. While the Chandra Sekh̄ar interim government was at least serious in the attempt to promote elections in the Punjab, the return of a Congress minority government at the centre does not open up any promising perspectives as far as a change of the personal laws is concerned.

Meanwhile, the communal forces are carving out their own niche for women. Active participation of women in communal riots has been reported in a number of cases. The BJP projects Hindu universalism as the road to women's emancipation. At the same time, women are also in the forefront of the struggle for an independent Islamic Kashmir. The feminist movement has not come up with an adequate grasp of this phenomenon, leave alone with viable alternatives.

### *What is Freedom of Religion?*

Since communalist forces are working with the battle cry that religion is in danger, and since women's rights are systematically eroded in the name of freedom of religion, it is of vital importance to ask: What is freedom of religion?

In the Indian context, it has been pointed out that freedom of religion does not mean the absence of religion from public life but

'equal respect for all religions'. This definition is valid and helpful insofar as it takes seriously the corporate dimensions of religious life which are guaranteed in Article 26 of the constitution. It also takes seriously the sociological fact that human beings are social and political and that convictions about ultimate reality cannot strictly speaking be a 'private' affair.

However, this is also where the hitch lies. It is precisely this corporate character of religion which is exploited by communal forces. This leads to exploitation of religious factors in political battles and to constant concessions to reactionary religious forces, mainly at the cost of women's rights. At the same time religious rights are being encroached on by the State in the name of curbing communalism.

On 26 May 1988 a central ordinance on misuse of religious institutions was promulgated in the wake of the Punjab crisis, which seeks to prevent political use of religious institutions. The bill replacing the ordinance was passed on 11 August 1988. This encroachment on religious rights went largely unnoticed. It was in fact welcomed by the CPI and CPI-M and only exposed in a critical editorial in *Economic and Political Weekly*, (11 June, 1988) and in a penetrating article on the subject by M.M. Thomas (*Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 August 1988) who called the Bill a "threat to secular politics". M.M. Thomas in his article argues that this law will only be used to suppress progressive religious forces while it will not help to curb communalism. This fear is warranted if one looks at the reception which Swami Agnivesh and a big group of Arya Samajis and other enlightened Hindu forces received when they marched to Deorala in protest against *sati*. It was they who were arrested for breach of religious peace, not the local defenders of the murder of Roop Kanwar, or the Shankaracharya of Puri. Swami Agnivesh was among the first to protest against this Bill. M.M. Thomas argues that "it is not a law separating religion and politics that can help but a law which permits and strengthens the struggle for religious, cultural and social transformation in the direction of the fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution within the religious communities."

What M.M. Thomas fails to mention is that the ultimate criterion for the genuineness of such religious, cultural and social transformation is what happens to women in the process. Apart from Swami Agnivesh one is at pains to think of any



religious leader who would publicly and at high cost have fought for women's rights at the expense of patriarchal controls upheld by religious communities. No religious leader or religious community has so far seriously battled against the human rights violations which are inflicted on women by the religious personal laws.

### *What is Secularism?*

In the recent debates it has often been pointed out that secularism is a Western concept which is not easily applicable to the Indian context. It has also been pointed out that strict separation of religion and politics is not feasible. However, the minimum consensus has been the rejection of any religion as a state religion and the guarantee to religious freedom. The women's movement has pointed out rightly, that a state which allows its personal laws to be governed by religious rules which regulate the life cycle from the cradle to the grave cannot be called secular. There has to be a demand that a secular civil code has to be implemented. However, it is questionable whether this has to be done by decree or whether there need be intermediary steps.

Sections of the women's movement sympathetic to the left parties, have held the conviction that religion should be respected only as a personal affair and should not govern social relationships. It could be that this stand is not only unrealistic and outdated, an outcome of nineteenth century bourgeois individualism, but that it comes in the way of building support for implementing the basic rights for women.

There is another view—that secularism could mean making the humanist substance of all religions accessible as common values to all citizens. This would lay the burden on religious believers to elaborate the humanist substance of their religion and to find ways to make them widely acceptable. This would also require a debate on humanism in an age of ecology and cultural pluralism. More specifically, the progressive substance of religious faiths should be measured by the criterion whether religious believers and communities are prepared to actively denounce and dismantle patriarchal controls over women.

In January 1990, the Women's Centre, Bombay, together with the All India Christian Council of Women held a seminar on the Christian Family Law which debated various proposals of an



alternative Bill. However, the government took the stand that only if all the Christian denominations together agree on such an alternative, action can be taken. Since blocks from the Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, and Mar Thoma side cannot easily be removed, the situation is in a deadlock.

The situation is even more stuck as far as the Muslim Laws are concerned. While progressive Muslims like Asghar Ali Engineer are severely critical of actual practices in India in the light of a much more enlightened interpretation of the Koran, fundamentalist forces uphold their position on refusing maintenance after divorce, defence of polygamy and divorce by threefold *talaq* in a single session without mediation.

The Calicut Conference of the autonomous women's groups in January 1991 bore witness to increasing communal encroachment on women's rights. During the National Conference on Women's Studies held by the Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) in Jadavpur University in Calcutta in March 1991 on problems of Religion, Communalism and Fundamentalism, the feminist lawyer Flavia Agnes from Bombay, in a plenary presentation, triggered off a very enlightening if at times painful discussion on the realities of a Hindu hegemonic culture even within the women's movement. She laid bare her own discrimination as a minority person within the movement, and alleged that reform of religious personal laws is normally seen more as a responsibility of the minorities who are seen as being more backward and oppressive towards women, though changes are as much needed in the Hindu Law and even in the Special Marriages Act (see Ruth Vanita, "The Special Marriage Act—Not special Enough," (in *Manushi* 58, May/June 1990). The debate took many women who had not thought of themselves as 'Hindus' by surprise. Once again, the identification of the hegemonic majority culture with 'secularism' forces the women's movement—as earlier in the Shah Bano controversy—to differentiate ourselves from majority communalist positions like that of the BJP. This, it appears, does not come as easily as one would expect.

### *What Can Be Done?*

In the present climate of political instability and severe economic crisis, together with the increasing communalisation of politics, it is unlikely that any government would like to add to its burden by

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taking up the introduction of a secular, gender-just family law in the near future. Meanwhile, discussing alternatives within religious communities and studying customary laws which may be more favourable to women, will be an important preparation for better times to come. In the absence of a better solution, the Special Marriage Act can be used by couples who want to evade the repressive double standards within their own religious laws. This, however, is not an easy step. It needs campaigning and support. It can create a consciousness that an optional gender-just law may build a bridge towards a generalised gender-just law. At the same time, the debate about religious and cultural identities is another important step to safeguard the pluralistic democratic content of our many faceted culture.

## 2 Women and Religion

It is only recently that the question of women and religion is coming to the forefront. So far, the main emphasis was on women's deteriorating economic situation, declining work opportunities, victimisation due to technological modernisation, self-help through self-employment schemes and on sexual and other violence against women, like rape, wife beating, dowry deaths and so on. Attention was also paid to women's health situation, family planning schemes, the effects of certain contraceptives like IUD's, depo-pravera and NET-en etc.

This does not come as a surprise since, in the feminist debate, patriarchy has been understood as exploitation of a woman's labour, sexuality and fertility. It is, therefore, only logical that primary attention should go to the economic aspects and to the actual physical subjugation of women. The only aspect where religion has come into the picture is the demand for a secular family code which has been raised on and off and, short of this, battles are today fought for Muslim women's rights to maintenance, for the right of Christian women to get a divorce, against extremes of discrimination in inheritance rights, for example, as in the Travancore Christian Succession Act.

While there have been investigations by women's organizations on the situation of women during communal agitations, such inquiries, important though they are, do not really raise the question of religion because they work on the assumption that religion is not really at the root of communal conflict.

This assumption is correct, as deeper studies of communalism have born out. Bipan Chandra has drawn attention to the fact that communalist forces are usually not led by people who are in any way deeply religious and that, on the other hand, people with a truly religious dimension would normally be anti-communalist.<sup>1</sup> Looking back at the history of the freedom struggle, Chandra observes that "religion was neither the cause nor the end of com-



munalism—it was only its vehicle".<sup>2</sup> At the same time, he gives many examples of how communalists opposed religious social reformers and vice versa.

It is, therefore, important to raise the question: What is the relationship of the women's movement to genuine reform? I do believe that this is a crucial question which has been ignored for far too long. I would like to define genuine religious reform as such a reform which enables individuals and groups to participate in secular political processes which are struggling for equality of all citizens and against economic, political and cultural exploitation, without being forced to abandon the faith-dimension of their religious identity. Besides, genuine religious reform crystalizes the humanist content in a religion in such a way that non-believers or people of other faiths can relate to this humanist content in their own rights. This latter dimension is an indispensable part of creating a rich secular culture.

This is a question which has not been raised in depth by the women's movement, probably for three reasons. First, the question of genuine religious reform is normally left out of the general debate on secularism. Religion is normally simply declared to be an obscurantist hangover which needs to be discarded.

Secondly, women, as primary victims of orthodox religion, have good reason to be resentful of religion in general. It is, therefore, not surprising that for example, in the wake of the Delhi riots, the *Saheli* newsletter presented a very simplified reductionist view on religion and women which ended with the appeal: "It is we who have to stop believing in gods and start believing in ourselves, our inalienable rights to a decent life on this earth. Our rituals have to be taken over by actions which lead to this. Our God has to be replaced by our love for humanity and our hatred for injustices."<sup>3</sup>

Thirdly, women, due to their position in society, have rarely been in the forefront of ideological production and especially of religious ideological production. Women have rarely been theologians. A few have been famous mystics or poetesses. It is, therefore, not surprising if the domain of religious reform has normally remained controlled by enlightened male intellectuals who, at times, could have been creative enough to rethink women's position in their respective religions. The question is to what extent women actively need to intervene in religious ideological production.

### *Women and Religious Reform in the Freedom Struggle*

It is difficult to comment on the question of women and religious reform in the freedom struggle at any depth, largely because of the fact that most writings which deal with the Hindu renaissance are in no way interested in the women's question. Women's studies on this period are on the way, but most of them have not yet been published. What I am saying here is, therefore, extremely tentative and very much derived from secondary sources.

Following Bipan Chandra's analysis, it can be said that communalism developed under conditions of "economic backwardness, interests of the semi-feudal, *jagirdari* classes and strata, the precarious economic condition of the middle classes, social cleavages within Indian society, its heterogeneous and multifaceted cultural character and the ideological-political weaknesses of the nationalist forces".<sup>4</sup> These conditions were aggravated by the colonial economy and polity, and by the desperate struggle for jobs among the middle classes. The latter factor helped communalism to acquire a real mass base. The communalist ferment was ideologically asserting religious orthodoxy and, thus, glossing over class differences, caste discrimination and oppression of women.

On the other hand, there was a certain ferment of religious reform, expressed, for example, in the Arya Samaj, which was prepared to incorporate a certain amount of social justice and women's concerns, but would go back on its stand when it got involved in communal politics. As far as social reform on problems of caste or women was concerned, the communalist ferment again and again took to violently reactionary options. This is true for Hindu and Muslim communalism alike.

The same is true of the extremist part of the freedom movement which, in contrast to communalism proper, was clearly anti-colonial, but on the base of a religious revivalism (which, in the name of a mythical concept of the motherland it developed) was prepared to defend caste, joint family, and communal village society. It saw these as precious expressions of the ancient Indian heritage based on love and collectivity as opposed to Western individualism and competition.<sup>5</sup> Apart from their obscurantist image of the "mother" which was based on Durga or Kali, and implied an idea of motherhood which would not have any openings towards alternative roles for women in the social reality, their inclination towards violent struggle would also not facilitate women's participation.



On the other hand, the reformism of the moderates which implied a stand against "social evils" like caste, child marriage and *sati*, and advocated education for women, did not achieve much mass appeal. It was Gandhi's specific brand of religious revivalism combined with social reforms, and a concrete method of action, which captured the imagination of the masses and provided a broad base for women's mobilisation and participation in the political struggle.

In "Gandhi on Women", Madhu Kishwar has analysed Gandhi's views on women in great detail.<sup>6</sup> Though she does not raise the question of religious reform, anti-communalism and a feminist perspective in a direct way, it becomes abundantly clear from her analysis that this connection exists. Gandhi's view on tradition was: "It is good to swim in the waters of tradition, but to sink in them is suicide." Though Gandhi originally believed in a fairly conventional sexual division of labour, ascribing women sovereignty in the house and leaving the domain of political struggle to men, the actual need to involve women in mass satyagraha and the bold participation of women in large numbers, forced him to change his views on women and housework or woman as property holders. His appeal to personal courage and a sense of suffering set free an enormous potential.

The interesting aspect here is that Gandhi appealed to women as independent individuals. Due to his belief in *brahmacharya*, he ascribed to women the right to say 'no' to sexual controls, even by their husbands. Though he saw women primarily as wives and mothers, he inculcated in women the right to resist. Madhu Kishwar emphasises that Gandhi's main contribution to the cause of women was "his absolute and unequivocal insistence on their personal dignity and autonomy in the family and society".<sup>7</sup> While he held up the traditional symbols of Sita and Draupadi for women to emulate, he gave these symbols a vigorous new life which was worlds apart from the commonly accepted lifeless stereotypes of subservience.

He constantly deviated from religious stereotypes in a very significant way. While his emphasis on *brahmacharya* and his appeal not to make women sex objects did facilitate women's freedom of movement, he did not fall into the trap of picturing women in the traditional Hindu way as seductresses luring the *tapasvi* away from his sacred pursuits. His exhortations went chiefly against men's aggressive attitude towards women. I agree with the way Madhu



Kishwar differentiates Gandhi's contribution from the 19th century reformers: "The most crucial difference is that he does not see women as objects of reform, as helpless creatures deserving charitable concern. Instead, he sees them as active, self-conscious agents of social change. His concern is not limited to bringing about change in selected areas of social life, such as education and marriage, as a way of regenerating Indian society, as was that of most 19th century social reformers. He is primarily concerned with bringing about radical social reconstruction."<sup>8</sup>

While Gandhi's appeal to religious sentiment is often seen as somewhat obscurantist if not bordering on communalism, it is important to recognise the vast difference between his use of religious idiom and that of the communalists and of the extremists in the national movement. His objective was not religious self-assertion but social reform integrated with the political goal of *swaraj*.

Traditionally, it is religion which mediates the link between personal life and wider political concern. Religions spell out a way of life as well as a world-view. In the communalist approach, the religious affiliation distorts economic and political issues. The result is socially and politically reactionary. In the enlightened approach of the moderates, or in the secularism inspired by more westernised leaders like Nehru, there was a nationalist appeal to overcome caste, communalism and oppression of women. But this appeal, since it was devoid of religious reform, could not have the same effect in terms of transformation of personal life and social relations in the freedom movement as Gandhi's. Even in the communalist movement, which achieved a considerable mobilisation of working women, it was difficult to raise specific women's issues like, for example, violence against women. Short of an autonomous women's movement, the Gandhian approach led a long way to a real transformation of women's lives, and the mediation between the personal and the political by religious idiom.

While appreciating this Gandhian contribution to women's mobilisation and actual transformation of women's lives, one has to face the difficulty that women finally did remain in a domesticated role within the movement. As Madhu Kishwar puts it, most women ended up as devotees. This has largely to do with a profoundly moralistic approach to power, which conceived of power in any physical sense as evil. Superior power had to be soul-power as opposed to body power, and women, the exemplary

sufferers, were seen as the supreme vessels of soul force.<sup>9</sup> Gandhi lacked a thorough analysis of power structures not only in terms of class, but also in terms of patriarchy. He did not encourage any organised constituency of women within the Congress, and as a result even high profile women leaders remained marginal to important decision making processes.

Gandhi was forced to adjust his ideas about women as property holders, see the importance of household labour in a woman's life, and acknowledge women's political potential over the years under the pressure of actual women's mobilisation. However, he was not forced by any organisational initiative to rethink on the question of power, nor was he forced to develop his religious imagery to go beyond individual appeals to courage and the sense of suffering.

While the Gandhian movement united aspects of religious reform and women's mobilisation in a forceful way, thus undermining the social rigidity of communalism and revivalism, another important impulse working in a similar way had been present in the national movement since the end of the 19th century in the form of the Dalit movement.<sup>10</sup> While Gandhi's religious imagery had remained high caste, the Dalit movement consciously mobilised an imagery from below.

Jyotirao Phule (1827–1890) belonged to the first generation of Indian reformers who were ruthlessly critical of the errors of the old society. While the next generation was more concerned with emphasising the "Hindu tradition", Phule, in his radical reform movement, ruthlessly attacked Brahmin domination, untouchability and oppression of women. While the orthodox like Tilak opposed women's education because it would lead to women running away from home and refusing to marry, the liberals thought of "modernising" Indian society by offering women education. Phule went much further by establishing the link between women's oppression, untouchability and caste. He founded the Satyashodak Samaj to give the cultural transformation an organisational base.

While his movement stood for radically equalitarian values, rationalism and truth seeking, it also had a component of religious reform. Gail Omvedt points out: "In dismissing totally the dominant religious tradition of India, Phule accepted the assumption that something had to be put in its place: even a revolutionary culture required a moral-religious centre."<sup>11</sup> He formed the concept of *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma* (Public Religion of Truth) and saw the



world as good and holy as opposed to the Vedantic concept of it as an illusion. God was seen as loving parent (*mu-buup*) and all humans valued equally as God's children. Phule laid great stress on an egalitarian man-woman relationship and on an inclusive language, for example, stating that "each and every woman and man are equal" instead of stating that "all men are equal".<sup>12</sup> Phule also reinterpreted sacred religious literature, for example, by reading the nine avatars of Vishnu as stages of the Aryan conquest and sing king Bali as a counter symbol to the elite's use of Ram, Janapati or Kali. While Phule's emphasis was very different from that of Gandhi because of his strong anti-Brahmin conviction, their method of mobilisation has similarities since it relates an emphasis of social transformation with religious and cultural reform.

The anti-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu had a somewhat different approach since it left out Dalits, and based itself on middle class people and middle caste values. While Periyar wrote a lot on the situation of women, large scale women's mobilisation could not be achieved and the values of Tamil womanhood projected by the movement remain highly ambiguous. The movement also lacked a deeper aspect of religious reform since it remained exclusively rationalistic in its original approach, but later compromised with religion without transforming it.

Trying to summarise, we can say that during the freedom struggle a considerable amount of social transformation was mediated by religious reform and women's mobilisation benefited from this religious reform. However, since women were not involved in the ideological production of these reform movements but only participated at the level of mass mobilisation, they usually remained objects of patriarchal benevolence and could not evolve an imagery which would have helped them to express their full aspirations towards transformation of patriarchal institutions.

### *The Context of Communal Riots*

The women's movement, though facing the issue of communalism primarily in the field of personal laws, is simultaneously confronted with the impact of communal violence expressed in massive physical confrontations. Such situations are extremely complex and it is difficult to generalise about them. However, some observations can be made.

Firstly, none of the communal confrontations has religious root causes. They derive their dynamism out of a combination of factors:



i. growing economic competition among sections of the middle class or the working class, following the expansion of a crippled form of capitalism.

ii. political mileage procured by siding with one "community" or the other.

iii. appeal of "community" and caste identifications which are violently exclusive of other communities and castes.

Secondly, communal confrontations are normally engineered and led by men. Women are often primary victims, having to bear the brunt of the effects of communal violence, whether it is rape, or loss of male members of the family. In addition, the disruption of "normal life," i.e. curfew, scarcity of water, fuel and food affects the household work of women and the well-being of children in the most direct way. Only in the Ahmedabad riots were women occasionally used as the forefront against the police, and a number of middle class women helped to articulate the demands of anti-reservationists. On the whole, women have rarely been active in communal riots and have a clear interest in avoiding them. This is all the more true since these riots strengthen *goondalism* and militarisation.

It is not clear whether the women's movement can interact at the socio-economic and political level at which communal riots are born.

It could do so only by not confining itself to 'women's issues' in the narrow sense (i.e. rape, dowry, personal laws etc.), and by women's organisations taking up 'general' issues from a women's perspective. There is a need for organising on civic and labour issues in order to create a mass base and viable support structures. For example, they could take a lead in slum-dwellers organisations (regarding anti-eviction efforts, and the right to housing, water, electricity and other basic facilities) and organising the unorganised sector (e.g. construction workers, *beedi* and *agarbathi* labourers, agricultural labour, domestic labour) in which large numbers of women are employed. While I know of some women's organisations trying to pursue such a mass approach, for example, *Penurimai Iyakkam* in Madras and Women's Voice in Bangalore, it is difficult to judge whether on the grounds of such an approach, inroads could be made where communal tension is already prevailing.

## *Rethinking Women's Position in Religions—A Methodological Reflection*

While the mainstream of the women's movement avoids entering into the subject beyond a general critique of religion as an oppressive force, there is also a fringe of the movement which uses religious symbols. I have met individual Muslim women in the women's movement who wish to remain believers and who try to reconcile their concerns with their religious commitment. Among Christians' attempts to develop a feminist theology are on the way.

The problem which arises is twofold. On the one hand, one has to grapple with the problem of use and reinterpretation of religious symbols in general. On the other hand, one has to deal with the problem of the use of scriptural sources in a way which takes socio-economic historical conditions into account. Since use of scriptures is the most obvious and widespread method, I would like to deal with it first.

The question of the use of scriptures naturally arises more in the explicitly scriptural religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which have been called "religions of the book". In Hinduism, the vast heritage of *Sruti* and *Smṛti* makes religious traditions much more complicated. Yet, certain scriptural sources like the Vedas, Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita or Manu-*Smṛti* are frequently referred to, and the great epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana are often looked upon as being rather authoritative.

There is a certain tendency of religious apologetics which tries to maintain that "originally" all religions were rather favourable to women and only "implementation" was lagging behind. We are reassured by quotations from Manu: "Where women are honoured, the gods rejoice" or from the prophet Mohammed: "Paradise is at the feet of mothers." In such quotations, the praise of women remains entirely abstract, and the patriarchal family relations which form the prison of the home in which the woman is made the queen, remain entirely unanalysed and untouched.

It must be said that the Hindu tradition is slightly more broad-based in this respect than Islam and, upto a point, Christianity, since it takes education and women's role in public into account. Thus, one may arrive at summaries such as the following:

"In the Vedic Age, women enjoyed full freedom for learning and even for choosing their own companions in marriage. A change came with the onset of Brahminism. The position of women



gradually declined with the rigidity of the caste system and lowering of the age of marriage. Buddhism and Jainism also affected women adversely."

"During the Golden Age of Hindu civilisation in the early fifth and sixth centuries A.D., women enjoyed equal rights and were even allowed to exercise public rights. However, further seclusion of Indian women started with the unsettled conditions inside and the invasions from outside in the eighth century A.D. The decline in the status of women became complete with the Moghul era, as purdah came to stay."<sup>13</sup>

The view here is clearly an idealised one because, in the Vedic Age and in the golden age of Hindu civilisation, all is supposed to have been well. Other authors, such as A.S. Altekar in his book *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation*,<sup>14</sup> take a more unilinear view descending from the age of the Rigveda (from 2500 to 1500 B.C.) via the age of the later Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanishads (1500 B.C. to 500 B.C.), the age of the Sutras, Epics and early Smritis (500 B.C. to 500 A.D.) to the age of late Smritis, commentators and digest writers (500 A.D. to 1800 A.D.). Here we see women's history evolving from a virtually golden age to the present *kali yug*.

Altekar's view at least has the advantage of linking the deterioration of women's position to their situation in a specific mode of production, their role in the production process, and in the overall cultural system like caste and religious laws. He clearly points out that where women have an important role in the production process and access to education and public life, their position is immeasurably better than in a society where women remain secluded, confined to housework, deprived of education and restricted by rules of purity and pollution.

Such a comparatively clear view becomes entirely obliterated by a romantic conservatism which combines an idealised picture of religion with an entirely biologicistic view of a woman's roles. For example, at an All-India colloquium on ethical and spiritual values, the following views were expressed.

"The woman is the seed bed of the nation; the home is the nursery and the country gathers the harvest. That the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world is not a mere truism, it is a proverb of pregnant significance. The child imbibes its tendencies and attitudes from the mother and inherits her ideals....."

"Our ancients gave an honoured place to the woman in the domestic set-up. Her welfare was the concern of the father, the



husband and the son. She was never abandoned without care and support.... She enjoyed a partnership of equality with her husband; she was the *sahu dharmasharee*. No religious rite would be performed without her participating in it. It is obvious that women enjoyed a complementary equality with men subject to reservations arising from their natural physical limitations."

It is interesting to note that this kind of conservative romanticism, combined with a biologicistic view of women's roles, claiming an ancient legitimacy for women's high status is not confined to an explicitly religious position. It can be found in secular cultural revivalism as well. One of the most baffling examples of this kind is C. Balasubramaniam's book: *The Status of Women in Tamil Nadu during the Sangam Age*,<sup>15</sup> in which he manages to produce a bold combination between the Golden Age theory in which women enjoyed education and freedom of movement and the "queen of the house" syndrome in which a woman is eulogised for her chastity (*karpu*), patience and submissiveness. He reproduces a large number of quotations from various scholars<sup>16</sup> which all maintain that women were "equal" and had an extremely high status in the Sangam Age, but the wife of Bhudappandiyan is praised as an erudite scholar and is also mentioned as the one who prefers *suttee* to widowhood.

Some authors do admit that women were kept in an inferior position but that their moral strength lay in not minding that and in cheerfully performing their indispensable household duties. Women are virtually worshipped for their acceptance of the status quo. Balasubramaniam, commenting on the infrequency of *sati* in Tamil Nadu, takes recourse to a quote from *Manimekalai*<sup>17</sup> where it is said that top class chastity would consist of dropping dead from grief at a husband's death while second rank goes to women committing *sati*, and third rank to those widows who lead a life of suffering. While, of course, *Manimekalai* is a rather late source of Buddhist inspiration, the striking fact is, that all this patriarchal and oppressive eulogisation of women appears in a book which claims to establish the equality of women during the Sangam age.

Similar tendencies can be observed in other religions as well. For example, it is often stated that women have a very high position in the Koran. However, if one looks into the matter, the presupposition on which such a statement is made is clearly the existence and strong affirmation of the patriarchal family.<sup>18</sup> Compared to the much more violently patriarchal environment of Arabian nomads,

the reforms of the Prophet were very protective of women and tried to give her security in the house as well as the right to remarry after widowhood and divorce. It is also true that due to the present day violently patriarchal culture in many Muslim countries, women may gain from quoting the Koran since it is more progressive than many of the customary laws which are actually imposed by the religious hierarchy. However, in Islam much more than in Hinduism, the confinement of women to their homes and to their so-called "biological" role as wives and mothers is a constraint which is difficult to break through.

In Christianity, a similar conflict can be observed. Actual preaching, social ethics and pastoral theology have entirely focused on the role of woman as housewife and mother. Quotes from St. Paul and pastoral letters are in abundant use, pronouncing man as the head of woman, exhorting woman to be chaste, obedient, inconspicuous and silent in public. The tendency here is again to keep woman stuck in her role as housewife, to eulogise her for her compliant submission, to honour her as a child-bearer and child-rearer.

However, feminist theology has discovered that this is not the whole story at all. While there is a trend among some feminist theologians to dump the Old Testament or biblical theology as a whole, because of their "phallocratic" character there is also another tendency to recapture women's history, not only as a history of suffering but as a history which has become obliterated by the fact that it is usually the victors who write the records. Recapturing our forgotten contributions and interim victories is part of recording the history of our sufferings. One of the strongest contributions in this direction is the book of Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza: *In Memory of Her*<sup>19</sup> in which the author establishes the leading role of women in the Jesus community and analysis the systematic roll back against the emerging organised forces of women. She shows how the patriarchal stronghold of a male-dominated hierarchy comes into being. Far from projecting a golden age, Schuessler Fiorenza attempts a materialist rewriting of early church history, documenting how the women who had come to the forefront were slowly driven back by the culture of patriarchy of the Judaic and Greek environment.

While it is not possible to go into the contents of liberation theology in this paper, I would like to derive a few methodological principles from my own experiences of working of this field, which



may help to unclog our minds on the question of how to deal with religious tradition:

1. It is necessary to analyse religious sources as far as possible with methods of materialist history writing. *i.e.* connecting any statement on women with their actual position within the mode of production of the time in which the statement is made. It has also to be taken into account that most religious sources, and most history books, have been written by men and that this has ideological implications of its own.

2. Research on the position of women in religions cannot focus primarily on religious laws and ethical norms which ascribe women a certain fixed position. Religious laws and ethical statements of this kind tend to focus on marriage and family, and the whole aspect of women's education, public life, contribution to economic and cultural production and of women as self-reliant human beings tends to be narrowed down to her contribution as wife and mother. On the other hand, most religious sources also know of women who have lived lives in their own rights, be they unmarried, married or widowed, and our attention has to focus on such women's roles which allows us to develop a wider perspective. Often, it is also necessary to draw on broader anthropological statements which are of general humanitarian value and to weigh them against oppressive role ascriptions. For example, the biblical statement that *all* human beings, women and men, are created in the image of God overrides other statements of subordination.<sup>20</sup>

3. It is also important to understand the distortions and blatant contradictions in most conservative writings. On the one hand, a golden age of freedom and equality is projected while, on the other hand, women are pinned down to a subordinated life as housewives and mothers. For putting up with the contradiction, women are put on a pedestal. This kind of distortion comes indeed out of a material contradiction which manifests itself differently in different modes of production. The need for production of life (*i.e.* child-bearing and child-rearing and maintenance work) which is seen as women's task in the family is in tension with the need to use woman's labour for the production of use and exchange value which requires women's work outside the house. The underlying problem here is one of sexual division of labour on the one hand and maintenance of patriarchy (control of a woman's labour, sexuality and fertility) on the other. Religion has been one of the strongest forces to uphold the institution of the patriarchal family.



Religious family laws mainly serve this supreme purpose. Likewise, patriarchal family has strengthened institutionalised religion. To break through this alliance is a major task which the women's movement has not even tried to tackle.

These three guidelines which I have tried to evolve here, are, up to a point, also applicable to the use of religious symbols. It may not always be possible to fully trace the historic origins of a religious symbol but certainly it can be analysed how it is appropriated by different classes. For instance, Sita, who was the symbol of the self-sacrificing wife in the eyes of orthodoxy, acquired the qualities of a self-willed courageous woman in the Gandhian interpretation and may be used as an outright symbol of protest if seen through feminist eyes.

As it is important to go into religious texts about women which go beyond the sanctified institution of marriage and family life, it is also important to go into the mythological heritage of religions in order to trace certain cultural assumptions about women which may be quite widespread in the public mind. There is, for example, a widespread assumption in Tamil culture that women are, in fact, bearers of supreme power and that this power needs to be controlled because it will turn destructive unless controlled. Thus, the power of women is supposed to be vested in their *karpu* (chastity) in order to ensure male control over women.<sup>21</sup> If one takes the trouble to go through the temple myths of Tamil Nadu, one discovers an ancient layer of goddess religion in which the goddess is a virgin or a powerful independent entity in her own right.<sup>22</sup> The *stala puranas* contain many versions which record the process of subjugation of the goddess, which usually ends up in sacred marriage. This process happens not only to the goddess but also to semi-historical figures like the Amazon queen Alli. Research into such historical backgrounds can unearth a protest potential as yet untapped.

Invariably, freeing women from the shackles of subordination involves making choices. In the same way as we constantly have to make choices between different roles offered in the family and in society at large, we also have to make choices between traditions and symbols offered: To combine an ideal of freedom and equality with women's exclusive destiny to be ideal wives and mothers is possible only in a hypocritical mind which tries to bamboozle us by means of cultural chauvinism. Real life and liveable values involve a more painful process of acceptance and rejection of

contents which have to be tested in their potential to free or to oppress women.

### *The Quest for Secularism and Cultural Identity*

While I am writing all this, I am painfully aware that the idea of delving deeply into religious texts, myths and symbols must sound rather exotic to most women in the women's movement. Certainly, there are countless, much more pressing, issues to be taken care of. However, there is no doubt that the struggle for a secular personal law which has priority for the women's movement is part of the wider struggle for a secular state and national culture. This connection has been forcefully drawn by some of the feminist writers, however, without going into a full analysis of what goes into the building of a secular culture. The whole argument tends to focus on the legal aspect only, by promoting the demand for a secular civil code and publicising it widely.

Worthy of support as this demand certainly is, its implementation gets stuck precisely because of the subtle or not so subtle pressure of majority communalism. An instance of this is the cataclysm during the Sikh riots of November '84 and which then found expression in the advertisement campaign of the ruling party during electioneering which systematically conjured up threats of violence and fragmentation of the nation. Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita made a very perceptive analysis of this election campaign from the angle of what women have to expect from the ruling party and, though they did not go into the issue of communalism in a very direct way, it became very clear in this article to what extent the communalist tendency is linked up with the patriarchal family syndrome and with the phenomenon of dynastic rule.<sup>23</sup> This is the kind of climate in which a secular family code cannot be implemented because the communalist vibrations created in order to catch the "Hindu vote" precisely make it necessary to assure the "minorities" that their "rights" will not be touched. In reality, of course, this means assuring Muslim and Christian males that their superiority in the family will not be touched.

Taking the issue up from a legal angle is good and necessary to the extent that women's rights are being claimed. However, this remains a sectoral demand. To go into the wider question of religious reform as one of the means to build a secular national culture means taking up a *general* question (i.e. of secularism and



a national culture) from a feminist perspective and thus going beyond a sectoral approach. However, this has to be done in a very dialectical way. The strong attack on religion by rationalists, and by parts of the women's movement, is quite misleading since it pictures religion as an arch enemy of humankind, thus creating a bogey which can be beaten easily, while the dimensions of class, patriarchy and political self-interest remain entirely invisible. This is a self-defeating strategy. Ruth Vanita rightly pointed out that the victims of the anti-Sikh riots did not experience themselves as victims of *religious* fanaticism but were aware of a concerted campaign by politicians and police.<sup>24</sup> She also cautioned against imposing a Hindu majority kind of version of secularism "which is what the government is doing anyway".

Madhu Kishwar visited Longowal village and interviewed Sant Longowal. The spiritual quality of the man and the place come across together with a very clear humanist content. It becomes clear in her writing that it was *irreligious* communal forces which were fanning fanaticism and murder while the humanist essence of Sikhism was made accessible to the nation in the religious reform which the Sant stood for. It also becomes clear that this enlightened religious tolerance is much less male chauvinistic than the saber-rattling militancy of the communalist fanatics. I would like to quote this as an example of making accessible the humanist content in a religion to non-believers and people of other faiths.

It is important to acknowledge that in communalism, in religious reform and in the women's movement a common question is raised but provided with different answers: the question of cultural identity. Communalism tackles the question by creating a false consciousness with the suggestion that people of the same religion automatically have the same socio-economic interest, irrespective of class or patriarchy, and that the way to implement this interest is to politically organise on the ground of religion. Defence of a religious personal law is crucial to this approach.

The women's movement tends to build on the assumption that there is a certain community of interest between all women, and that the barriers of class, caste and community have to be overcome. While overcoming class barriers entails clear political choices in favour of poor and exploited women, overcoming of caste and communal barriers is often attempted in a somewhat voluntaristic way by simply declaring that they are artificial and, thus, somehow unreal.



Genuine religious reform deals with the matter in a more dialectical way by acknowledging the social reality of caste and communal cleavages, and identifying and contesting their religious sanctions. An active effort is made to overcome the meaning systems which give legitimacy to such cleavages. A leader like Dr. M.M. Thomas declares wherever he goes that Christians cannot be communalists because they have to stand up for the new humanity in Christ and are, thus, responsible for safeguarding the humanness of every human being. He enables Christians to participate in secular political processes without abandoning their faith dimension, and he also makes the humanist essence of his faith accessible to non-believers and people of other faiths and thus contributes to a richer secular national culture.<sup>25</sup> His contention is that rationalism and religious faith in certain ways need each other in other to correct their mutual self-righteousness.

Since M.M. Thomas makes radical statements in religious language, he often suffers the fate of not being heeded by religious congregations (because of his political convictions) and by the secular political movement (because of his faith dimension). However, one does need to ponder the point that rationalism cannot always take its own rationality for granted (for example, the statement that religion is the greatest divider of mankind is not a rational statement), while a humanist faith can be quite rational within the parameters of the aim to build a human society.

An approach similar to that of M.M. Thomas is followed by Swami Agnivesh who was on the road in saffron robes instantly in protest against the anti-Sikh riots. He, like M.M. Thomas, openly theologises on his option for the poor and on his political choices. At the same time, he makes it clear that political processes have to be free from the control of religious institutions. His saffron attire and religious language may alienate some people who are strict rationalists or those who feel that Vedantha can only be seen as reactionary. On the other hand, he reaches people with an emotional attachment to this particular religious tradition, and offers them identification with the poor, with human rights issues and anti-communalist religious tolerance which would otherwise remain beyond their horizon.

Among Muslims, Asghar Ali Engineer has been untiringly recapturing the humanist traditions within Islam.<sup>26</sup> He has paid a heavy price for his efforts even physically, being exposed to the violence of the reactionary forces in a very direct way. His re-inter-

pretation of *Jihad* for liberation, as opposed to *Jihad* for aggression, opens up a social justice dimension suppressed by the conservatives. Faith to him means upholding the perspective of hope. God's sovereignty is not seen in competition to human initiative but, on the contrary, as a source of setting it free. While this kind of religious humanism is rare and comes under pressure from institutionalised religion, it is nevertheless an important ferment of cultural transformation. Since such enlightened individuals are open to the women's question, they may occasionally incorporate it. M.M. Thomas, in fact, has developed a growing awareness of it over the years. However, a feminist dimension of liberation theology has not yet evolved to any substantial extent.

There is an additional reason why the women's movement needs to go into the cultural question more deeply. The effort to give women a new sense of identity beyond family, caste and religion needs to grapple with the problem of cultural identity and continuity. It is comparatively easy to point out what has been oppressive and destructive of women in our cultural heritage. But, the question, "What are the protest values and the humanist values of our cultural traditions?" also needs to be answered if shallowness is to be avoided. To work out the materialist and rationalist heritage is only one approach to this question, which leaves the reservoir of humanism within religion entirely untouched. The need to draw upon this reservoir also arises while facing the task of bringing up children in a meaningful way. Most activists confront the problem of having to relate to much more conservative and even very religious families in a constructive way. Their children have to bridge the gap between a nondescript culture in their own home and something very different in the homes of their friends and relatives. What does one finally believe in?

Often women in the movement are frightened to touch religion because they are frightened of communalist reactions and cleavages. This is a very real problem. However, making each others religious symbols accessible in a secular spirit is a different matter, and it can become quite constructive.

### *A Note on the Nature and Future of Religion*

Certain underlying assumptions on the nature and future of religion which are implicit in the different stands on religion need to be clarified. There seems to be an overall assumption among leftists, as well as women activists, that religion is reactionary and



oppressive because it is, on the one hand, rooted in the ancient inability to master nature, and, on the other, in the function to justify class society and patriarchy. While historically religion has had all the functions described in these theories, there may be more comprehensive ways of looking at it. Religions have also been expressions of the human capacity to anticipate, to hope, to transcend given limitations and to grope for the meaning of life in history and in the cosmos.

Religions have offered their believers a code of ethics, a sense of being answerable to others and for the fate of others, symbols facilitating psychological integration, ways to make sense of good and evil, and integrate elements of poetry, art and story-telling. They have given meaning to the life cycle, to the rhythm of the year, to interaction with nature, suffering and joy, and to birth, ageing and death. One has to distinguish how much of all this is illusory and how much is valid. Of course, secular ideologies and philosophies, political movements and class organisations try to do the same in different ways. However, under the pressure of day-to-day struggles, bureaucratic functioning, electioneering and ideological rigidity, their capacity to create a valid humanist culture has often remained stifled.

This is also true in countries which have experienced revolutions. It is instructive to look at those countries in which religion has been stripped of economic and political power, *e.g.*, the countries of eastern Europe. In some of these countries, religious gatherings have created an opportunity to form and express a public opinion, which has otherwise no place in the rigid social set-up. Half of the people who come to church are scientific atheists. Nevertheless, this is more than using religion as a tactical umbrella for ventilating alternative opinion. The complexity, open-endedness and pluralism of religious symbols and forms of expression can accommodate forms of creativity which fall through the grill of rigid conceptualisations.

In the German Democratic Republic, churches have become the free space in which questions of peace, ecology and women can be expressed, notwithstanding blatant deviations from the officially accepted line. Religious space in society can be one of the rooms of relative autonomy of collective self-organisation, provided religious leadership is stripped of the power to coerce the followers into obedience and blind faith.

In India, we are in the relatively fortunate position that the



building of people's movements (women, ecology, people's science) is allowed. We are also relatively fortunate in the sense that secularism can be fought for by democratic means, a right much more sharply curtailed in all our neighbouring countries. While taking an anti-religious stand is one way of making use of this right, the attempt to appropriate religious history from below, is another way of going about it. Instead of allowing communalist forces to hijack women's issues, we can as well try to discover our own religious history as women, across communal barriers, and on this ground dismantle the communalist claims of religious and political leaders.

This may require some of the following steps:

- i. To reinterpret the accepted and hidden meanings of each other's scriptures, stories, myths, rituals and festivals, from a women's perspective.

- ii. To develop a basically non-polemical discourse on religion which enables us to be equally tolerant of people who are occasional or fervent believers as of those who are decidedly agnostic or atheist, without implicitly labelling some as "backward" and the others as "progressive".

- iii. To be sensitive to the dynamism of minority and majority communalism even if it is clothed in secular argument.

- iv. To explore inter-religious, anti-communalist arguments and make them known.

- v. To make known religious traditions which are genuinely pro-women and pro-poor in such a way that bridges are built.

- vi. To attack oppressive religious practices without making unnecessary generalisations about a particular religion or about religions in general.

- vii. To unmask cases where religious camouflage has been used to obscure socio-economic and political interests.

- viii. To work towards separation of religion and state at the level of legal and political institutions.

I am painfully aware that I have been raising many more questions than I can at present attempt to answer. The more uncertain question is whether the women's movement can succeed in efforts at mass organisation on issues of daily survival such as water, housing, ecology, price rise, organisation of the unorganised sector, together with class organisations and people's movements, and at the same time develop a women's perspective on these issues. Without building a mass base, the ideological interventions which

were discussed earlier in greater detail, will remain ineffective. However, the fact that many class organisation have succumbed to communal onslaughts, makes clear that the need to raise the emotional appeal of anti-communalist forces is of great importance.

### *Alliance of Anti-Communist Forces*

Since secularism is not a sectoral demand, the women's movement cannot fight this struggle alone. It has to ally itself with other forces which are fighting for the same objective. However, the forces trying to build secularism in the present situation are by no means homogeneous.

In Kerala, the CPI-M has been able to champion the cause of a secular civil code to a certain extent. The fact that the party has a broad base in this state and that the People's Science Movement has worked to build a scientific consciousness, accounts for a more favourable situation here as compared to many other states. However, often enough, electoral considerations do weaken the left parties in taking a clear anti-communist stand, as was obvious during the national election campaign of 1984.

Enlightened intellectuals in different religious communities also play an important role in creating an anti-communist climate. It is important that the rationalist forces and the forces of religious reform which try to creatively work out a progressive faith dimension, do not become mutually antagonistic.

Dalit and tribal movements, which drastically attack caste and contest the domination of the mainstream Hindu culture, have an important contribution to make towards a pluralistic secular culture. At the same, they may not always find it easy to come to terms with existing forces of religious reform of mainstream Hinduism. Take, for example, the reinterpretation of the terms *arya* and *dasyu* which Swamy Agnivesh has to offer. This may not be acceptable to a Dalit perspective, while his involvement with bonded labourers or his participation in *Ekta-morchas* after the anti-Sikh riots are very important contributions towards the building of a secular humanist culture.

The women's movement may face its own difficulties in relating to all these forces because it may disagree with the party analysis of class and patriarchy, it may find the enlightened intellectuals to be paternalistic in dealing with women, it may find the champions of tribal and dalit culture to be have romantic notions about women which are not always helpful in day to day interaction. Finally, as

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women in the women's movement, we may realise that we find it difficult to agree on issues of culture and religion. There are no easy answers, but indications are that the perspectives on secularism, religious reform and a pluralistic humanist culture are deepening within the women's movement. If the challenge is taken up, women will be able to make the most crucial contribution towards building a truly humanist secular state.

As far as legislation is concerned, the women's movement needs to explore the possibility of contributing proposals for a secular family law, taking the existing personal laws into account. Such a law could offer an option for all progressive citizens to subscribe to and build their family life on a secular base. It is women who stand to gain the most from such an option.



### 3 Discussing Sexuality

Why, in the first place, is it so extremely difficult to talk about sexuality and why is it necessary to do it all the same? It seems to be very difficult to find even approximate answers to the first part of this question. What precisely is the taboo which is attached to talking about sexuality, especially where women are concerned? How much of this taboo is "Indian", how much is "Victorian"? How much is "middle class"? Or is it, on the other hand, in fact very "middle class" and "westernised" to *want* to talk about sexuality? How much have we ourselves internalised the prevalent cultural stereotype that *men* are sexual beings who have a birth-right on sex, but are basically exempt from cares about fertility? How much do we see ourselves primarily as child-bearers and sexless mother-animals satisfying our need for physical contact through mothering and undergoing sex as a household chore?

In India, the need to discuss sexuality seems to emerge much more as a tail-piece to the discussion of fertility and fertility control. The compulsion to get and remain married is overwhelming. A single woman is supposed to fall a prey to sexual harassment. Thus, marriage often appears like a haven of freedom from sexual harassment. What is being projected here?

Bearing children is as compulsory as marriage. An infertile woman remains an ill-omen (and the assumption is always that it is the woman who is infertile). Escaping into "motherhood" often appears as an escape into sexlessness. This has to do with the overall assumption that consent to marriage is an overall consent to have sex with one's husband at all times and, of course, with no one else at any time. The whole concept of marital rape appears extremely alien. At the same time, many women experience their first intercourse as something highly traumatic. The compulsion to have sex leads to the compulsion to use contraceptives. It is often only when the disastrous side

effects of contraceptives on women's health become visible that their total lack of control over their own body becomes apparent. Often, this is the point where discussion on sexuality starts. It is usually a discussion on suffering. Sexual desire and fulfillment of desire remain peripheral. The sense of shame which becomes visible in these discussions is real and needs to be respected. Even though Alexandra Kollontai of the Russian revolution compared the right to sex with the right to a glass of water, one can't forget that water is not usually consumed in the nude, and that the very fact that those "private parts", which are normally hidden from anyone else, get exposed in sex, accounts for tremendous vulnerability. It is no accident that torture often uses sexual means since it tries to catch human beings at their most vulnerable points. Even speaking of sex, we make ourselves vulnerable, but only by conquering our own vulnerability, saying *yes* to it and transcending it, do we become capable of developing a new wholeness and sovereignty.

This essay draws on experiences which emerged while analysing a primary health programme for landless agricultural labourers—women in North Arcot<sup>1</sup> and the experience of the women of the fishing community in Kerala. I am trying here to outline something of the complexity of the field, which comprises sexuality as a self-expression and a way of relating to others, and the interaction of sexuality with our other forms of self-expression and ways of relating to others. The question "What do we want?", not only in terms of fertility control but also in terms of control over our own sexuality, remained an overriding question throughout the discussions. This is not only a personal question but a policy question, which has a bearing on demands and forms of organisations not only in the women's movement but, even more so, in so-called "mixed organisations". And of course, when we say "*we*", it does not mean we are talking of the educated elite assembled in a national seminar but it means: 'What is it that poor, illiterate, dependent village women want?' It is a vast and difficult task to find this out.

### *The Western Heritage*

Padma Prakash has raised the question why the women's movement in the West has evolved into a health movement to a much farther extent than the women's movement in India.<sup>2</sup> I certainly cannot offer a full explanation for this difference, but it appears to



me that a crucial factor contributing to the Western development has been, what has sometimes been termed as the "sexual revolution" of the post-war period, *i.e.* acceptance of pre-marital sex and change of sex partners as a fairly normal part of life. As is well-known, in most countries of Europe and in the U.S., a major catalysing factor for the women's movement has been the struggle for a liberal abortion law, and this struggle, which has been carried on since the sixties, is by no means won. Abortion as a basic right had become crucial in societies where pre-marital sex was increasingly accepted. At the same time, the State and religious institutions (especially the Roman Catholic Church) were trying to protect and uphold the institution of the family and to boost declining population figures by making abortion inaccessible. The results of this were hair-raising. In many countries the estimates of illegal, and often highly hazardous, abortions were equalling the number of births. This made struggle on the issue of health an obvious need. Women found themselves in the clutches of the judiciary, the medical profession and religious institutions, all ganging up against them, trying to control women's sexuality and fertility. It was obvious that access to contraceptives and to safe legal abortion was a key issue. Also, demystifying the medical profession became more imperative since the medical institutions were so obviously interlinked with the state apparatus and with the religious lobbies.

What was overlooked during the late sixties was the fact that this constellation was very characteristic of later capitalist consumer society in which "having sex" was in line with "having so many other things". It is only from the early seventies onwards that women became fully aware that the so-called sexual revolution had been a very patriarchal event, in a number of ways. Women who had started eagerly using hormonal oral contraceptives as soon as they became available, slowly discovered that they had been taken for a ride by men and by drug companies. Thereupon, the search for less harmful alternatives and the impetus to the health movement grew. A book like Germaine Greer's *Sex and Destiny* is a clear example of this whole development. Greer inquires in detail into traditional and non-invasive forms of fertility control and also shows interest in sexual practices which are less likely to lead to pregnancy.

A discussion on her book has hardly taken place in India. While



magazines like *Sunday* reprinted sensational-sounding observations about the harmfulness of the IUD, her overall approach of connecting autonomous fertility control with control over sexuality, and placing it in the overall context of social structures, especially family structures, has hardly been debated. While Greer, recovering from the strains of atomizing Western individualism through research in Third World surroundings, including India, may be somewhat romantic about the potential for female bonding in traditional joint families, her criticism of atomised individualistic concepts of sexuality and of fertility-control cannot be discarded for this reason. The critique of slogans like "my belly is mine" which were prevalent in Europe during the seventies, has recently been voiced by ecological feminists like Maria Mies. Veena Das, in a different context, has criticised the individualistic and isolationist tendency in the struggle for abortion rights and pure "freedom of choice" ideology. Empirical research has shown that, in fact, most women do take the decision to have an abortion in a way which entirely reflects their relations in society.<sup>3</sup>

In India, hardly any discussion on sexuality takes place. If at all it is mostly as part of the discussion on obscenity, media policy or rape. A male friend recently confessed to me that until he was thirty he had not been able to really understand what rape was, because even while seeing the compulsory rape scene in any Indian movie, he had assumed that what was concealed behind the dramatic music and thunderstorm-downpours was simply "having sex". A female student related to me her experience with sex-education in a renowned women's college. The teacher, who on the insistence of the students had been assigned to tell them the "facts of life", had started off by saying that sex is sin and that's why it takes place at night. Consumerist movie culture hints at this kind of "sinful" sex, i.e. implying denigration of women in an alluring way all the time. Therefore, anti-obscenity campaigns are an obvious activity of many women's groups. However, since such campaigns often appeal to Victorian or indigenous feudal values which depict women as sexless, they also reinforce narrow moralism and do not actually facilitate an open debate on sexuality. At the same time, the debate on contraceptives has almost completely left out sexuality as a topic. A number of my friends in different groups of the women's movement have remarked that they feel *Our*

*Bodies, Ourselves*, a book produced by the Boston Health Collective, to be very obsessed with the intricacies of sexual intercourse and with body consciousness in general. My impression is that this observation has to do with very real cultural differences in attitudes towards sexuality and fertility.

### *Material Base for Sexuality in India*

One of the aspects which surfaced during the discussions in our seminar was the observation that sex is not a biological but a social event, and that attitudes towards sexuality are shaped by caste/class factors, and are highly culture-specific and gender-specific. For example, it is often observed that among tribal communities sexuality is handled more liberally and is somewhat less male-centred. Among low caste-working class women, sex is often described as a daily household chore, the sexual demand of the male going unquestioned and women's own role being expressed in terms of beast of burden.

I have encountered such descriptions extensively among agricultural coolies and fisherfolk women. Among middle class women, escape from sexuality into motherhood seems to be a more prevalent pattern.

As far as I can see, there are some basic material factors which make the Indian approach to sexuality and fertility different from Western ones. One aspect is climate. The heat accounts for less clothes and therefore less alienation from one's own body, from early childhood. This goes together with more indulgent patterns of child rearing and a lot of skin contact between child and mother as well as many other persons. Body functions are keenly observed, oil baths given, home remedies used. At the same time, living patterns are such that overcrowding is normal and, while being in harmony with one's body is easier, there are, at the same time many constraints. Gender segregation is an important cultural factor. However, children sleep with their parents and thus unavoidably witness sex but they are never enlightened even at a later age about what is going on. This contributes to the assumption that sex is an underlying possibility everywhere all the time, but that it cannot come into the open.

There is also a marked difference in the attitudes towards one's body inculcated in girls and boys. Girls are schooled in a sense of shame from an early age. This reaches a climax at the



onset of menstruation. Boys are also physically controlled, but to a much lesser extent. Women in the countryside and in the slums have to ease themselves, under cover of night, always with the possibility of sexual assault in mind while men can expose their private parts freely. In the house, men can move about more or less bare-bodied while women always have to be dressed "decently". Since sleeping arrangements are crowded and are partly outside or on roof-tops, most people sleep in their usual clothes, *i.e.* women sleep in saris and *cholis* while men may wear only a *lungi*. Privacy and nakedness are nowhere in the picture. I think that this partly explains why *Our Bodies, Ourselves* looks alien to many Indian readers.

Another important factor is the fact that marriage is virtually compulsory and that getting children is imperative. This means that sex is highly institutionalised and functionalised. I have found it expressed extensively among middle class and working class people that men see the need to get married when their mothers become too old to cook for them. The need for a wife has primarily to do with the need to have access to the facilities of survival: cooking, washing, cleaning, emotional support and sex are all part of a package deal of facilities to which a man has a birth-right.

The other side of the coin is that women are brought up to provide all these services, including sex. What they are promised in return are "protection", "security", "respectability". It is obvious that this arrangement is upheld by the constant threat of violence. While a woman is trained in housekeeping to provide these services expected of her in the proper way, she is not told about sex, except that men "expect" it and that she has to "obey" her husband's wishes and to "adjust". There are marriage vows in which the husband promises to "love" his wife, while the wife promises to "obey". This has obvious implications for the physical side of the relationship as well. Sex is thus completely removed from her own subjectivity; her body is the "property" of the husband and decision-making about her own body, be it with respect to sexuality or fertility, is conceptually reeled out. If quite a number of women start to assert their right over their own bodies after years of marriage, this happens in defiance of the dominant ideology and social arrangements.

I would like to add an observation. From discussions with women's groups at seminars etc., it emerges that while women



agreed that though they had a right to control their own bodies and to enjoy sex, it was obvious that most of us had not really resolved this problem in their own lives. This has partly to do with the fact that consciousness grew during a married life which was started under more traditional assumptions. Even feminists find it difficult to accept the sexual rights of single women. Another factor seemed to be that many of us did not give sex a very high priority in our life. Our priorities are freedom of movement, equitable division of labour, getting our work done, advancing the women's movement, coping with children. Most of us did not seem to have sex very frequently or to be very dependent on it for emotional gratification. While there was a certain regret expressed on possibly missing out on something beautiful and important, it was also acknowledged that perhaps one can't have "everything" in life. A person with whom one has enjoyable sex is not necessarily also a person who respects one's work and convictions, and agrees to a fair division of labour. Likewise, a person with whom one agrees on priorities, lifestyles and division of labour, need not be sexually most attractive. Sexuality, therefore, can only be seen in the overall context of our life options, and sexual gratification and freedom is only one criterion among others to measure the content of relationships and the quality of life. Western lifestyles have often over-emphasised sexuality so much that it could not be understood in this overall context.

### *Ideological Assumptions*

Some of the prevalent ideological assumptions about sexuality have already been mentioned. Sex is "dirty" and therefore taboo. Sex is also considered to be such an important drive that any man and woman left alone with one another are invariably expected to end up in sexual intercourse. Men are born sexual beings, women are born for motherhood. This dichotomy is expressed in cultural values which go back to ancient literature. For example, in Tamil, a man is supposed to have such qualities like *viram* (braveness, virility) and (manliness). A woman is meant to have *thaymai* (motherliness) and *karpu* (chastity). While the "masculine" values include sexual potency, the "feminine" values deny and control sexuality. By definition, a woman's physical existence does not lie under her own control. She is meant to pour her love out to her children, and to concentrate

all her physical desire on marriage and on her husband. Even in this relationship, the point is not *her* well-being but invariably *his*. The good wife is still the one who, according to folk-lore, carries her bed-ridden husband to the brothel house because he so desires or, as a variation, behaves herself like a prostitute in bed if he so desires. The common denominator in both cases is denial of a woman's subjectivity, self-respect and self-determination. Invariably, therefore, the other side of the picture of the chaste housewife is the prostitute—the myth that a woman's sex-drive is insatiable if she is not kept under control and the idea that any woman who develops her own skills, talents and decision-making will end up in prostitution. In fact, so powerful is the myth of prostitution that E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker of the DK Movement devoted a whole chapter to it in his book *Pen yen adimai anal* (Why are women enslaved?) under the title, "On prostitution", without ever mentioning the existing institution of prostitution.

The dichotomy between the chaste housewife and the "prostitute" seems to be all-pervading and it seems to be overwhelmingly difficult to transcend this. In *Silapattiharam*, the national epic of Tamil Nadu, the chaste wife is Kanagi who can set Madurai on fire by the power of her chastity (i.e. loyalty to her husband Kovalan), while the other heroine is Mavathi, the dancing girl, whose morality is redeemed by ascribing to her the same loyalty to Kovalan as that of Kannagi. When Kovalan leaves her, she becomes a Buddhist nun. Periyar resolves the dichotomy by denigrating the family and encouraging women to go on a child-bearing strike. Present day anti-obscenity campaigns often take recourse to the traditional sentiment of *karpu*, *sumangali* etc. in order to "rescue women's honour". This means mobilising feudal values in order to potest against the attempt to sell women's bodies on the flesh market. The does not necessarily enhance women's autonomy.

Gandhian ideology has done much to encourage women's autonomy. It encourages women to refuse being sexually used; it denounces men's "lust" and tendency towards violence. All these are indeed very valid positions to take in the face of a rising tide of pornography and assault. Gandhi also saw women as pillars of strength, capable of resisting rape, able to determine their own lives and to make a contribution to national development. But he did all this at the cost of not acknowledging



sexuality in any positive sense. Sexuality, in his view, was legitimate only as an instrument of fertility; it did not have any value of its own. The moral superiority of women was located precisely in their supposed sexlessness. Since nobody else seems to be able to do the job, it looks as though the women's movement will to have answer the question of how sexuality and fertility can be reconciled, and to spell out what we mean by control over our sexuality.

### *Sexuality and Fertility*

We are back to the assumption that the link between sexuality and fertility is the dominant problem, and that this is the overriding problem of women since women have to cope with child-bearing and with most of child-rearing. Sexual maturing more or less coincides with maturing of fertility, though psychologists have acknowledged that sexual feelings are common and overt in infants, and latently present in growing children. Social taboo prohibits one to admit this, though motherly responses often have sexual undertones. The social assumption is that the awakening of sexuality for a girl coincides with the onset of menstruation. This is the reason for enforced gender segregation, and in earlier times, for child-marriage. At the same time, menstruation is linked to ritual pollution, social ostracism and shame, and thus both sexuality and fertility get linked up with this kind of negative connotation.

Besides, women seem to be automatic medical cases, bound to have "disorders" and, even if healthy, subjected to pre-natal and post-natal check-ups. Menstruation is associated with discomfort, pain, cramps, restricted mobility. Social ostracism, based on notions of purity and pollution going with it, enhances all these aspects, and is compounded by lack of knowledge about one's physiology. Marriage is seen as a "solution" to many of these problems. Menstrual pain will be less "after marriage" and, of course, sexuality will be safely under control after marriage as well. As is amply documented, fertility control has been focusing on women, often with very disastrous side-effects and, thus, it seems that sexual activity makes women *more* of a medical case, causing bleedings, pain, blood-pressure and many other complaints. The scope to develop a positive attitude towards one's own body and towards one's own sexuality is very narrow within this setting. Even after a woman has under-



gone tubectomy, it is *not she* who exerts control over her sexuality, but the husband. I frequently meet women at the village level who, for this very reason, did feel that, weighed against the risk of child mortality, sterilisation did not have much of an advantage.

However, there is another side to this picture. While discussing a health exhibition on human reproduction in North Arcot villages, the women themselves came out with very different observations. While depicting the male and female sexual organs, and talking about the different aspects of intercourse and fertilisation, the women pointed out that, in fact, the link between sexuality and fertility lies more in male physiology than in the female. While the male can only reach sexual satisfaction in the form of orgasm when he ejaculates sperm which, in turn, may lead to fertilisation of an egg, it was pointed out that the female organ of sexual pleasure, namely the clitoris, is entirely "useless" and without any function as far as fertility is concerned. Of course, it had been a major step in the learning process to admit, in the first place, that the clitoris exists. This means that sexual censorship is so strong that even plain admission of physiological facts appears sacrilegious. Mere mentioning of such facts lays us open to allegations of being obsessed with irresponsible pleasure seeking. While information on African genital mutilation are nowadays available and make sickening reading, they obscure the fact that genital mutilation can take the much subtler form of keeping women in ignorance and complete alienation from their own bodies. The idea that sexual contact need not, at all times, involve penetration and that the female orgasm is relatively independent of penetration still sounds unusual, to put it mildly.

Another observation which was made during those health discussions was that women are indeed less genital-centered in experiencing their sexuality. As some of the younger women put it: "We often don't like intercourse because it can be so rough and violent but we do like to be kissed and caressed." Thus, from a female perspective, the relationship between sexuality and fertility is by no means as direct as is generally suggested. It is only the assumption of this automatic connection which logically leads to all those invasive technocratic interferences with women's fertility. Knowledge of a woman's menstrual cycle and of more female-centered ways of having sex, would go a long way in enabling women to move away from medical as well as sexual violence.

The one point where aspects of sexuality and fertility are really connected in women's lives is the fact that non-invasive methods of fertility control need male co-operation and that the respect which, at least in theory, is accorded to motherhood needs to be extended to a woman's whole physical existence. Women's health needs start from childhood and continue till old age. Women need to be respected as sexual beings, with their specific physiology. Health rights have to include sexual rights and responsibility for women's physical condition as a whole, much before and beyond "motherhood". It is often pathetic to see how pregnant women are dumped in their parents' house, their husbands not taking responsibility for delivery and children. Likewise, women are abandoned in illness, with hysterectomies, cancer or whatever else may befall them. The husband only takes charge of the right to have sex and to beat up. Worse things of course could be said about "lovers". It has to be acknowledged that women face life and death issues in fertility control as well as in child-bearing. Instrumentalising women for sexual use completely masks these life and death issues and, thus, is deeply inhuman. The question is, how the life and death responsibility which goes with fertility can be shared as a common responsibility.

Sexual intercourse, as it is enforced in most cases or depicted in movies and often enough described in sex manuals, ignores women's physiology, psychology and social situation most of the time. As such, it is not only a violation of basic human rights, it is also a highly obscurantist and unscientific way to go about things. It is a male-centered mystification.

A non-violent and creative way of fertility control can only go together with reconstruction of non-violent and creative sexual relations. One of the most obvious cases in point are methods of natural family planning, especially those based on observation of the cycle of mucus discharge, which can determine a woman's ovulation with great accuracy and, if properly applied, is as reliable as any other family planning method. Meera Sadgopal has pleaded that this method of birth control be included in people's science campaigns. She has made a very valuable contribution by analysing research on the method and making its scientific content visible. It is, however, ironic that this method has been practised and propagated chiefly by Catholic agencies, who are the last to endorse a woman's right over her own sexuality. The significant characteristic of this method is that, more than any other, it is vested



in women's *knowledge* and observation of their own bodies and works with methods of self-examination in which women touch their private parts, which they are normally taught not to do. These parts of her body are normally supposed not to "belong" to her and not to be touched by her. They are reserved for husbands and medical personnel. Thus, NFP as a method greatly strengthens women's acquaintance with their own bodies and, consequently, also decision-making about sexual intercourse.

### *Male and Female Sexuality*

While implicitly a number of differences between male and female sexuality have already been pointed out, it is necessary to face a few aspects which need further sorting out. The media project sex-crime and pornography for male audiences and "romantic love" images for the "female psyche". In neither of these cases can women be seen as autonomous, thinking, feeling, decision-making beings. They are depicted either simply as "the hole" into which a penis can be thrust or as "the heart" consuming itself in anxiety about the beloved. In both cases, to be headless and mindless is considered a major virtue in women. Both projections are, thus, male-centered and deny a woman's personality. The two projections are also connected in that the servility which is implied in the "romantic love" concepts is indirectly enforced by the omnipresent latent or overt threat of violence. Romantic love implies both servility and "protection"; protection in turn is based on violence. This is what Susan Brownmiller had in mind when she stated that *every* man benefits from the existence of rape.

The existence and prevalence of rape, incest, pornography and brutality have been made much more visible due to the existence of the women's movement. They are instrumental in enforcing control over women's lives and have a definite bearing on day to day relationships between women and men.

At the same time, sexuality can express the greatest tenderness that human beings are capable of. The contradiction is unresolved and will take generations to be resolved.

An aspect which needs exploration is the fact that women's bodies are indeed more multi-purpose than men's and are, at least under the violent conditions of patriarchy, more vulnerable. While a woman's breasts are erotically highly sensitive, they also can perform the function of an udder. The vagina, which is used in intercourse, is also the birth channel, the outlet for menstrual blood



and the road for invasive medical investigation and contraception. The fact that the sexual act itself can either be enchantment or torture, even leading to death, probably remains the most maddening aspect. The greatest mystery, overshadowing *any* intercourse, is the question, why is it that men can derive pleasure from a sexual act which annihilates another human being. Here the nexus between sexuality and power becomes most clear. Sexual violence is at the root of patriarchy. It is part of warfare, but also part of daily life.

Some of the best analyses of this problem can be found in an article which appeared in *New Internationalist* under the heading "Give and Take Sex, and the Politics of Pleasure",<sup>4</sup> which connects the brutalisation of sexuality with the alienation and exploitative structures of society at large. Debby Taylor evokes the counter-image to a male sexuality of subjugation in the caring sensuousness of mothering as the matrix for creative and tender sexual relations. Emmanuel Reymond compares the male obsession with "potency", i.e. with erection and ejaculation, size of penis etc. to the need to flex one's muscles to show off brute force. Reymond argues that, in reality, sexual power is the least of a man's problems. His real malaise is the absence of pleasure and his real sickness is frigidity. By analogy, if women suffer from frigidity it is due to their lack of power to create a sexuality of sensuousness which is not preoccupied with genital contact as such, but with comprehensive loving and caring. Not only this, women are often so much brain-washed to accept sexual stereotypes that they themselves not only perpetuate their own passivity but even *expect* violence as a sign of "manliness". This is analogous to the popular conviction that if a man doesn't beat his wife he doesn't care for her.

There are some physiological factors which have developed into social habits, and which *can* be changed. For example, the fact that orgasm in a man is marked by ejaculation, leads to the habit of thinking which considers that intercourse is "finished" when the man has ejaculated. Whether the woman has had an orgasm or not, he usually does not know. He may simply not be bothered or he may assume she has had one. She may also fake an orgasm to keep him assured of his "performance". Surveys on the matter indicate that this is the case quite frequently.

The fact that a woman's orgasm is less easily identifiable than a man's, because his sensibilities are not trained to perceive the subtle movement, leads to a situation in which women often or

even most often, have sex without ever experiencing orgasm. The response of women to this situation is either frustration or an emotional compensation which looks at sex, not as primarily "goal-oriented" (i.e. "achieving" orgasm), but as an ongoing communication which can be meaningful also without this ultimate climax.

This latter compensation is again made more difficult by men who think it is the only natural thing to have "two or three rounds" and then sleep off instantly. Men normally declare this to be "purely physiological". While the physiological factor cannot be denied, men with awareness and motivation can easily overcome this. In fact, a woman after orgasm also experiences the physiological factors of relaxation and tiredness. The point is that most of the time she hasn't had one. So, she wants at least to communicate, caress, be close. This again contributes to the myth that women are endlessly demanding, and sexually "insatiable".

On the whole, men are more likely to use sexuality as an outlet to pass on the tensions of their day to day life to women, while women do not have this kind of an outlet. While the penis can be a tool (e.g. for "making pregnant") or a weapon (sex as punishment, conquest etc.), women's sexual equipment (sensitivity of touch and smell) makes sense only in exchange of tenderness and pleasure. However, being constantly subjugated through man's tremendous lack of sensitivity and ignorance about a woman's body, if not outright violence, women's sensuousness is systematically killed off.

In the fishing community, the men who have been out at sea fighting with the elements, expect sexual servicing as routine part of maintenance of life: subjugation of women is an extension of subjugation of nature. The women who have done the marketing and the housework, experience the sexual act as yet another form of enslavement, and wish to be left alone out of sheer tiredness. At a recent conference of the traditional fisherfolk in Trivandrum, the women had insisted on posing the women's question for the first time under the heading "The rape of women and the rape of the sea", connecting the women's question with the ecological question. They then invited the men to speak out on the topic and, for the first time, the men felt compelled to face this issue directly.

### *Sexuality and Social Roles*

It has become obvious that sexual stereotypes are connected in a very direct way with social roles, and that sexual subjugation is at



the root of all other subjugations. Putting it the other way round, sexual behaviour can only be changed if change in social roles is made possible, and *vice versa*. Of course, the connection is not always an automatic one. A woman who is economically independent may still be sexually exploited, and a woman who is economically dependent may be lucky enough to have a husband who treats her well. However, on the whole, the crucial point remains: that a woman is supposed to be the physical property of her husband and that a woman who is not "controlled" by a husband is supposed to be "free for all". The whole concept of a woman having control over her own body is virtually unthinkable. This seems to be analogous to women's lack of control over other areas, which is essential to keep women in subjugation. During a celebration of International Women's Day, we used the slogan: "Does a woman ever have a house?",—thus posing the problem that a woman is a stranger to the house of her birth and to the house of her in-laws as well. Likewise, one could ask: "Does a woman ever have a body?"; does she ever inhabit her body in her own right? Similarly, women often have no right to own land, and even if they do get involved in agriculture and do virtually all the work, they are not allowed to touch the plough.

The analogy between control over land and control over women is strikingly expressed in speech and idiom. A recently arrested bigamous husband, torturing his two wives in scandalous ways, used to do this with the comment: "I am a man, I am born to rule the land". In the village near Usilampatti in Madurai district a woman who remains unmarried will be called *upputtarsu* (unfit for cultivation) which is analogous to the term used for waste land. She will also be called *Yarum Sindamal irukk* (one whom no man has cared to touch, i.e. to appropriate) and *adangatheva* (she cannot be controlled, sexually controlled). She lives under constant threat of rape; she is threatened that her breasts would be cut off, and forced "suicides" seem to be quite common. In such circumstances, sexual terror is constantly used to make independence impossible, even though it might be economically viable.

The other important aspect which comes into the picture if one analyses the connection between sexuality and social roles is sexual division of labour. It is a common saying that men are born to be "always on top", "in society, in the family and in bed. If feminists point out that sexual intercourse can be more satisfying to a woman if she lies on top since in this case her clitoris is then more easily



stimulated, this may be dismissed as exotic imagination. However, the tenacity with which women are kept "down" socio-economically as well as sexually, in fact betrays a hidden knowledge of existing connections. It is true that the world will be turned upside down if women are not "controlled" sexually, because sexual suppression and cruelty, as well as sheer insensitivity, are deeply related to all other forms of subjugation, torture and indifference.

One of the problems which remains is in what was traditionally called "reproduction" and what we today prefer to call "production of life" *i.e.* child bearing, child rearing, household and all sorts of other human maintenance work. These are considered to be the exclusive responsibility of women. As long as men do not learn the skills of caring and sharing involved in this work, they will be unable to be caring and sharing lovers; and as long as women do not have access to wider decision-making, they cannot acquire autonomy in making decisions about their sexuality and fertility. Among the fishing community, the woman is expected to wait on the seashore for the return of "her man". Myth has it that his physical safety is dependent on her chastity, and that he will drown if she relates to another man. Since women are responsible for the messy side of life anyway, *i.e.* being responsible for sweeping, washing, cleaning, looking after children, coping with menstruation and child birth, it looks logical to shove a contraceptive into them and to make this an excuse for even more careless sexual use. To aim at mutual respect, care and tenderness based on deep sensitivity seems to strain our imagination too much within the existing social conditions.

### *Sexuality and Human Freedom*

It has become clear by now that discussions on sexuality in a feminist perspective are not discussions about "free sex" but about power relationships and violation of human dignity. During the workshop, when we tried to define what we mean by control over our sexuality, we said: "We want to be free to decide how we relate physically, emotionally and intellectually to others, men and women as well as our whole social environment, and we want also to be free to determine how others relate to us; we do not want to be made objects nor mindlessly to follow prescribed roles."

The present pattern is that women are treated as property and that men are not answerable in their sexual behaviour. We are striving for a situation where no human being will be owned by

another, but where everybody will be answerable in mutual responsibility and compassion. Intercourse requires consent, including in marriage, and violence has to be eliminated in every form, inside and outside marriage. Sexual freedom cannot be the freedom of the consumer society which makes sex a commodity and human beings objects. Being knowledgeable about our bodies and learning to love tenderly sounds a simple enough task, but the barriers which prevent us and others from doing so are gigantic, and need to be dismantled piece by piece.

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## 4 Women and Work—A Marxist Perspective

During the hundred odd years since Marx's death, many developments have occurred which were not fully anticipated during his life-time. Among the recent mass movements which have been triggered off by the deepening crisis of capitalism are the peace movement, the ecological movement and the women's movement. One of the difficulties in analysing these mass movements in Marxist terms lies in the broadness of their concerns as well as in the fact that there is a strong middle class participation and leadership in them, while working class participation or working class hegemony is found only in some local situations but not in these movements as a whole.

What these three movements have in common is that they deal with problems which originate at a point in history where class society comes into being. Yet, the nature of the respective problems is such that it is not *automatically* resolved in the attempt to establish a classless society. Of course, the survival of capitalism and competition with its economic and technological achievements go a long way in explaining the arms race and the need for nuclear reactors. But these do not explain wars among socialist countries nor furnish an explanation for the under-representation of women in the higher echelons of political power in all the countries which have tried to establish socialism. This means a detailed Marxist analysis of war and peace, interaction with the natural environment, and the women's question is needed.

It is needed all the more since capitalism has produced a technology which has brought humankind to the brink of destruction. The possibility that nuclear war, planned or accidental, may wipe out the human race, is a very real one and demands our most urgent intervention. If one reads about the effects of nuclear radiation (even if it stems from "peaceful" use of nuclear energy), it becomes clear that the suicide of humankind could as well be effected by slower methods than an immediate nuclear bang. Even fresh air to



breathe and water to drink can no longer be taken for granted. Besides, rethinking on the question that matter is after all finite and so are natural resources, would certainly enrich the Marxist discussion as well as the ecological movement.

There has been, fortunately, an ongoing Marxist debate on the women's question but this too has to be deepened much more. This is crucial since the development of war technology as well as the industrial processes which make the total depletion of natural resources, and destruction of human life due to environmental collapse, a real possibility within only a few generations, have undeniably been invented and marketed by men, largely excluding women and against their interests.<sup>1</sup> I hasten to add that this development realised its full potential of destructiveness under the conditions of capitalist class society and that the threat of destruction spearheaded by the Western capitalist powers, especially the U.S., confronts women and men alike. Yet, for historical reasons, the potential of self-destruction (by means of war and by ecological exhaustion or collapse) has been acquired by the Soviet Union as well and this is why Marxist analysis is all the more necessary for getting rid of it. At the strategical level, of course it will be crucial that the basic issues raised in the above-mentioned mass movements get appropriated by the international working class. Only if this happens will there be a chance that the deepening crisis of capitalism which has triggered off these mass movements, is not allowed to end in destruction but will help to overcome the capitalist system and to develop alternatives which are not only liveable but also sufficiently attractive to rally mass support.

In the following pages, I would like to concentrate on recent attempts to develop a Marxist understanding of the women's question. According to my understanding the debate has suffered a lot from the contradiction between different strategical options, *i.e.* socialist feminists trying to establish the need for an autonomous women's movement, versus orthodox Marxists taking a class reductionist position and encouraging women to join the labour force and working class organisations in order to participate in the revolutionary process and see their specific oppression resolved in due course. This contradiction often entailed a distorted debate on "cultural revolution first" or only "during and after the revolution". The taking of different strategical options often made a strong impact on the analysis itself, (*i.e.* it is often not the analysis which leads to the strategical options but practical

constraints of a certain local or national situation which push people to a strategical option and then colour their analysis).

I would therefore like to keep the debate on the strategical options aside for the moment and try to go back to certain points in the analysis which have made the role of women in history, and their specific economic exploitation and cultural oppression under capitalism, *visible*.

### *Recent Restatements of Positions*

One of the crucial questions in the debate is how to characterise household labour and how household labour is or is not related to social production. This implies the question how to characterise household labour within the process of capitalist accumulation. Another important question is how patriarchy can be characterised, and what is the organic link between patriarchy and class society. This also leads to the question how sexual oppression contributes to the exploitation of women's labour in the house and under conditions of wage labour. I would like to start from the debate on household labour and go into the other questions in due course.

### *Household Labour and the Value Theory*

The effort to analyse household labour in terms of the theory of value started when Mariorosa Dalla Costa and Selma James made the claim that household labour aimed at the production of labour-power.<sup>2</sup> Labour power being paid not according to the labour time spent on creating it, the unpaid household labour of women is seen as a source of surplus value. Domestic labour is thus seen as productive labour and the family under capitalism is seen as a centre of social production.

This position has been modified by Wally Seccombe<sup>3</sup> who maintains that though household labour does not create surplus value, it creates value, namely by converting commodities bought with the labourers' wage into regenerated labour power. The housewife thus contributes to the value of labour power which gets exchanged in the production process. Seccombe claims that "all labour produces value when it produces any part of a commodity that achieves equivalence in the marketplace with other commodities".<sup>4</sup>

This position has been refuted by Paul Smith who points out that it is not "all labour" that produces value, but labour performed within the social relations of commodity production which takes



the form of socially necessary, abstract and social labour, and it is necessary to examine to what extent domestic labour in social formations dominated by the capitalist mode of production conforms to this. Paul Smith points out that there are two ways of looking at household labour: one as production of use values, concrete labour producing use values for consumption and not for exchange, and secondly, production of labour power which enters the exchange of the market.<sup>5</sup>

Secombe takes a confused position here, because he maintains on the one hand that housework does create value but on the other hand equates it to unproductive labour (for example, any labour exchanging services for the means of subsistence but not creating value).

Leaving this contradiction aside, Paul Smith makes the point that "the analogy is not with the unproductive worker hired out of revenue but with the simple commodity production of independent handicrafts men or peasants who employ no labourers and confront me as seller of commodities, not as seller of labour, and this relation therefore has nothing to do with the distinction between production and between productive and unproductive labour".<sup>6</sup>

Smith concedes that even though household labour is concrete and private, it would be argued that it produces the commodity labour power outside the capitalist mode of production and that the commodity labour power then gets exchanged like any other product.<sup>7</sup> However, he refutes this position on the following grounds: Firstly, domestic labour cannot be subsumed under commodity production because fluctuations in the price of labour do not affect the performance of household labour, *i.e.* the commodity labour power is continuously produced, even if it is in relative over-supply. It is therefore not equal and interchangeable with other concrete labour and so is not abstract (value creating) labour.

Secondly, domestic labour, not achieving equivalence with other forms of labour qualitatively, can also not achieve equivalence quantitatively since there is no competition between household units to minimise their labour time and inefficient households do not fail to sell their commodity.

While this argument can be taken to be correct in a formal sense, it still deserves further examination. It is, for example, not true that fluctuations in the price of labour do not affect the performance of household labour. If wages go down, this results in a lengthening



of the working day of the housewife. Jean Gardiner has made this point of the housewife functioning as a "cushioning agent"<sup>8</sup> between the labourer and capital in times of economic crisis. Usha Menon has ridiculed this aspect<sup>9</sup> postulating that in times of crisis the wife will not sit and knit sweaters at home but join the labour force as well. She does not consider the fact that in times of crisis women are the first to be laid off. Apart from a lengthening of the working day, depressed wages may lead to higher child mortality, etc. which in turn would affect the production of labour power negatively. If women keep bearing sufficient children to replenish the labour force all the same, this means they take steps of extreme self-exploitation to safeguard minimal security in their old age but in the process contribute to capital accumulation by keeping the price of labour low.

It is also not true that household units are entirely outside the process of competition. One of the important motivations for men to get married is the prospect of "home-cooked food". The attraction of home-cooked food lies in it being better in quality, taste and nutrition-wise, and cheaper as compared to commercially produced food, be it in canteens, hostels or hotels. Of course, an inefficient household does not cease functioning but an inefficient housewife easily gets coerced by extra-economic means to live up to certain standards, i.e. she gets beaten up if she does not perform.

I would, therefore, maintain that household labour indeed produces the commodity labour power and does so in private and concrete labour, the conditions of which are, however, up to a point affected by the price of labour and market competition. To categorise this process of transformation of production of use values into the commodity labour power more precisely I would require a more detailed study of housewives' working days than is at present available. Even though the position remains vague as far as the time-lag is concerned, I would go along with Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen who maintains that the use-values produced in the household become exchange values when the labour power produced and reproduced in household labour gets sold.<sup>10</sup>

### *Household Labour and Consumption*

Usha Menon in her article on household labour acknowledges that, looking at things at the level of the mere labour process, the production of use values, or household labour can be looked at as production.<sup>11</sup> However, under conditions of capitalism, she

categorises household labour as a whole, as consumption. Her intention is to analyse household labour in the *historical* framework of capitalism. While cooking and washing can be seen as production, abstractly speaking, "under the capitalist economic formation all these activities can be considered only as aspects of individual and not productive consumption because the activity in the household is not directed towards the production of labour-power. Seen from the capitalist society's standpoint, the activity in the household results in nothing but the human component in the process of production, or it is nothing else than the process of consumption by which the human being is reproduced".<sup>12</sup>

Yet, she neglects the fact that this consumption is not only an indispensable part of the production process but also is a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital. Marx puts this connection in the following words: "The individual consumption of the labourer, whether it proceeds within the workshop or outside it, whether it be part of the process of production or not, *forms therefore a factor of the production and reproduction of capital*, just as cleaning the machinery does whether it be done while the machinery is working or while it is standing. *The fact that the labourer consumes his means of subsistence for his own purposes, and not to please the capitalist, has no bearing on the matter.* The consumption of food by a beast of burden is none the less a necessary process of production, because the beast enjoys what it eats. *The maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital.* But the capitalist may safely leave its fulfilment to the labourers' instinct of self-preservation and propagation."<sup>13</sup>

It is precisely part of the exploitation of capitalist production that it makes the human component and the labour which goes into producing it to appear as non-essential for the accumulation of capital. Apart from the necessity to acknowledge the production and reproduction of labour power as integral to the process of capitalist production, there are other decisive deficiencies in characterising household labour as consumption. Not only is it necessary to develop a terminology which is able to differentiate between such tedious processes like cleaning, pounding and grinding rice, cutting vegetables and cooking them etc. from the act of eating up the ready meal. Otherwise our analysis of the working day of a housewife will not be sharpened but blunted and



obscured. Besides, we also have to acknowledge that housewives, as a rule, are the household members who consume the least while producing most of the use-values. Part of female malnutrition and mortality in India is precisely due to this fact that women eat the leftovers of the meal and get hardly any rest or medical attention. It does not make the real situation visible if Usha Menon maintains that "production of children conceptually belongs within the sphere of individual consumption, since children are to be regarded as extensions of the self. It is an activity similar to producing oneself".<sup>14</sup> It is part of the awareness building process within the women's movement to point out that a woman's needs and potentials are *not* identical with those of her children.

Another important point is the earlier one referred to by Paul Smith, that the parallel with household labour is simple commodity production by independent handicrafts men or peasants.<sup>15</sup> Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen draws this parallel<sup>16</sup> and categorises household labour as subsistence production. Other authors like Maria Mies and Chhaya Datar have also used the term "production of life". I will go into the difficulties of this conceptualisation in the next passage. The term "production of life" is, of course, again, a very sweeping one which makes it difficult to distinguish between processes of production and of consumption in the domestic sphere.

The term subsistence production is meaningful in this context since a lot of labour expended in the household sphere does not consist of processing wage goods but implies activities which provide use values for direct consumption by direct interaction with nature resembling the food gathering stage. This, however, happens under the capitalist system where the resources of nature themselves are used for capitalist accumulation and production of surplus value. Two obvious examples are the gathering of fuel (*i.e.*, firewood or cowdung for production of cowdung cakes) and the fetching of water, with both processes becoming more and more time consuming under present Indian conditions but absolutely essential for the creation and survival of the labour force.<sup>17</sup> They can obviously not be termed as consumption in the capitalist sense as worked out by Marx in the introduction to *Grundrisse*.<sup>18</sup> Subsistence production seems to be a fitting characterisation of this labour process.



### *Subsistence Production and Capital Accumulation*

The connection between substance production and capital accumulation has been worked out by Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, Claudia von Werlhof and various other authors.<sup>19</sup> Both Bennholdt-Thomsen and Werlhof try to analyse the role of subsistence production for the political economy of capitalism. They comprise under subsistence production household labour<sup>20</sup> be it in the metropolitan countries or the periphery (which would be mainly performed by women) and the subsistence production of peasants (men and women) in the so-called Third World countries. Acknowledging class and social differences between these categories, the communality is seen in their production for consumption under conditions of generalised commodity production. Both Werlhof and Bennholdt-Thomsen consider subsistence production to be an integral part of capitalism even though the production of use-values "at first sight may not seem to be integrated into generalised exchange relations. It would also be wrong to consider it to be another mode of production, articulated with the capitalist mode, since it is an integral part of capitalism. Capital cannot operate without subsistence production, for extended reproduction is based upon subsistence reproduction; products from the latter are essential to the former. Under capitalist conditions, use-value always has its counterpart in exchange-value of subsistence products is not always immediately apparent".<sup>21</sup> Bennholdt-Thomsen does not succeed in making this process visible apart from her general argument that household labour, through producing use-values, produces exchange value in the form of labour power with a time-lag. Bennholdt-Thomsen then goes into a historical argument on the relation between subsistence production and extended reproduction. In precapitalist modes of production, subsistence production was also social production and vice versa. "Only with the emergence of generalised commodity exchange and socially determined wage work does subsistence production become relegated to a sphere which is considered to be either not properly social or even outside or apart from social work".<sup>22</sup> She then goes on to blame Marxism "which accepts the appearance of the separation of so-called social production from subsistence production as something real, thereby accepting the basis for alienation".<sup>23</sup> This accusation seems to be based on a misunderstanding. Bennholdt-Thomsen focuses on problems of *exchange* and takes these as a criterion for expressing the role of subsistence production in

capitalism (even though she does not succeed in spelling out this exchange fully.) The criterion for placing subsistence production outside capitalism is ever based on the conditions of production which, as was shown above, pose difficulties in characterising household labour as abstract labour or social production. One has to agree here with Paul Smith who says: "It is not Marx's theory of value which marginalises domestic labour, but the capitalist mode of production."<sup>24</sup> Both Paul Smith and Usha Menon solve this problem by placing household labour outside the capitalist mode of production but seeing it as a part of the capitalist social formation and a necessary precondition for capitalist production.<sup>25</sup> My difficulty with this terminology is that "social formation" usually signifies particular societies within certain geographical boundaries while mode of production signifies a general concept used for analysing the history of human society.

The problem which Bennholdt-Thomsen and Werlhof really try to put forward is that capitalism seems to *need* subsistence production in order to be able to achieve extended production and that this is a *continuous* process.

This is something like an ongoing process of "formal subsumption" of non-wage labour under capital without however entailing the "real subsumption" which would entirely change the production process.<sup>26</sup> Bennholdt-Thomsen coins a category of marginal subsumption in this context. Bennholdt-Thomsen and Werlhof base themselves on Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* where she argues: "For its existence and future development capitalism needs non-capitalist forms of production as its surrounding."<sup>27</sup> Since Luxemburg believed in Marx's theory of the tendency to generalise wage labour, this led her to assume the self-destruction of capitalism, for which she was severely criticised. Bennholdt-Thomsen and Werlhof question this tendency. Bennholdt-Thomsen observes: "There is no country today where wage-work has not become the determinant social relation, even in those cases where it does not prevail quantitatively (*i.e.*, where there are more peasant producers than wage workers). At the same time we cannot close our eyes to the evidence that the transformation of all work into wage work is not taking place. Worldwide, there are more unpaid subsistence producers than wage workers. Hence, we come to the conclusion (to paraphrase Luxemburg) that capital itself reproduces its own non-capitalist surroundings in the imperialist as well as in the dependent countries."<sup>28</sup> In fact, the



problem of survival of subsistence production in family units was not raised only by Luxemburg but also by the Russian economist A.V. Chayanov, as Daniel Thorner has pointed out.<sup>29</sup> After the proletarianisation of the housewife, "housewifisation" takes place again.<sup>30</sup> Still the question remains: Which function does the continuous reproduction of non-capitalist surroundings have to capitalism? Benholdt-Thomsen and Werlhof give somewhat different answers. The function of the reproduction of subsistence production within the capitalist mode of production would be to create a vast reserve army of labour which, however, is not really needed by capital for wage work. Yet, since the "marginal mass" struggles only for survival and does not aspire to a higher standard of living, its very existence keeps the wages low. Besides, Benholdt-Thomsen makes another emphasis: "The important point is that the marginal mass is in charge of its own reproduction and, being an available reserve, it makes its labour power (directly and indirectly through the product) cheaper for capital. It is this particular point we want to emphasize in our analysis. When a section of the population is responsible for its necessary subsistence work, the appropriation of surplus labour for capital increases enormously."<sup>31</sup> Of course, this conceptualisation requires a lot of research on how "marginal subsumption" really works, and the class differences within this wide concept of subsistence production would have to be worked out carefully. Yet, the effort to relate subsistence production and extended reproduction has to be carried.

Werlhof goes one step further. She claims that subsistence production is part of a process of continuing 'original' accumulation. The problem is that she introduces this concept of ongoing original accumulation with the greatest ease and without much explanation while discussing Rosa Luxemburg. Yet, there is a fundamental contradiction here. According to Marx, original accumulation consists of separating producers from their means of production.<sup>32</sup> Luxemburg shared this assumption which led her to the theory of self-destruction of capitalism. This means, if she describes how capitalism—in a process which indeed one could term as ongoing original accumulation—subsumes again and again non-capitalist forms of production, this logically leads to the self-destruction theory. If, on the other hand, as has been shown by various authors, subsistence production does *not* cease to exist and the subsistence producers are *not* deprived of their means of production, then *how* precisely do they contribute to original capi-



tal accumulation and thus create the base for real or extended accumulation? This question is tackled neither by Werlhof nor by Chhaya Datar who take this conceptualisation over from Werlhof. Most likely, the simple answer to this question would be that subsistence production is necessary to make production of surplus value possible. This sounds a bit like: Behind the labour of every man there is a woman who makes it possible. Yet, the question has to be answered: What are the means of production in household labour (apart from a woman's body which she uses for child bearing)? In which sense are these means of production (body or otherwise) taken away from her or not? What role does extra-economic coercion and violence, play in the process? Werlhof does not discuss how the contribution of continuing original accumulation is to be measured in relation to total accumulation. But she claims that this relationship of ongoing original accumulation to extended accumulation can be traced at the macro level between centre and periphery, and at the micro level in any relationship between a man and a woman, inside or outside the household.<sup>33</sup> This claim would have to be substantiated to be convincing.

One everyday example which comes to my mind, where women's subsistence production indirectly *does* make extended reproduction of capital possible, is again the production of cowdung cakes and collecting of firewood. The "social forestry" policies which are very much geared to industrial needs have extended women's working day immensely since provisions of fuel for cooking needs are getting much more difficult to come by. Yet, women patiently and uncomplainingly do this work, take it for granted, cook all the same and thus replenish government policy.

### *Sexual Division of Labour in Household Labour and Women's Wage Labour*

The separation of household labour from social production, and the absorption of women into wage labour, are both new phenomena under the capitalist mode of production. They have confronted women with the "double burden" of wage labour and housework and have led to what Joan Smith chose to call the "double fertilization of women as mothers and as workers".<sup>34</sup> Yet, she does not succeed in establishing the connection between the two, and misses the role of violence and sexual coercion in keeping women subordinated in household labour as well as in wage

labour. Chhaya Datar poses the problem in the following way: "Women's labour seems to have special features which creates problems in enabling it to acquire characteristics of wage labour, i.e., labour under public production system; and even when women do participate in the public production system, their labour is treated and controlled under different labour control systems than that of men's."<sup>35</sup> Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison have worked out that relations of production are not only class relations but are, at the same time, shaped by what feminists call patriarchy, that patriarchy thus not only dominates the process of reproduction but also permeates class relations and the production process.<sup>36</sup> They point out that patriarchy implies the control of a woman's labour (both in the household and as wage labour) and that this control is closely and crucially connected with control over her sexuality and her fertility. They, thus, go much beyond Engels' analysis that patriarchy and monogamous marriage are necessary in class society in order to safeguard inheritance. Also, they therefore do not go along with Engels' assumption that under capitalism, in the proletarian family there is no material base for patriarchy and only some hangovers of culture or ideological oppression can be found.<sup>37</sup> Marx in another context acknowledges that the labourer still owns women and children, and has the power to be a slave dealer and sell their labour power.<sup>38</sup> Claudia von Werlhof has raised the issue of woman as man's property throughout different modes of production, and has developed out of it an argument about the "combined class position" of women, which however, cannot be examined in detail within the scope of this essay.

Since the sexual division of labour and possession of women by men predates capitalism, it is important to show how these factors have been subsumed under capitalism. It is therefore necessary to trace patriarchy under capitalism as well as under the conditions of social production as in the field of so called human reproduction which, by Marx himself and by many feminists, is also termed "production of life".<sup>39</sup>

Marx saw the involvement of women in wage labour as a relative progress in the sense that it took women out of the domestic sphere where she did household labour as well as other productive labour (for example, in peasant and artisan families) under direct patriarchal control of the husband. It is therefore a disturbing factor, to be analysed carefully, why even though the sphere of



household and factory are now separate, patriarchy has been carried over into the relations of production all the same. Chhaya Datar, using a number of case studies on female labour, summarises the following characteristics of female labour:

i. The cheapness of female labour constituted by the following elements: low money cost of wages, low cost of reproduction of female labour (*i.e.*, the woman does her subsistence work herself, the man keeps a wife to do it); their role as "supplementary" income earners based on the concept of the family wage and the "breadwinner"; their belonging to the reserve army of labour power.

ii. Their submission at work (among other things due to their role as reserve army).

iii. Reproduction of subordination at the workplace (for example, use of sexual pressures by male supervisors).

iv. Interplay of capital and patriarchy (*i.e.*, wage work seems to be an escape from strict patriarchal control at home).

v. Sexualisation of skills (*i.e.*, work categorised as unskilled is often in fact based on very intricate skills acquired in housework).

vi. New forms of struggle (for example, when finding it difficult to unionise, women may find other ways of struggle, such as getting possessed by spirits or finding other unorthodox ways to boycott the production process).<sup>40</sup>

Another aspect, discussed by Datar in a different context, is the tendency to place women's wage labour back into the home, where they produce isolated under patriarchal conditions. This also entails, usually, appropriation of their wage, nearly entirely, for the needs of other family members while, at the same time, national or international capital appropriates the surplus they produce. This mechanism does not develop only where firms privately enter into rural household production but it also develops as a result of the efforts of self-help organisation or as "development" programmes of World Bank, Ford Foundation etc.<sup>41</sup> In this particular type of wage labour which Maria Mies has called "housewifisation", the direct link between sexual division of labour in subsistence labour in the household and in wage labour becomes particularly visible. This patriarchal component in the division of labour is something which divides the working class and therefore the fight against it has to be integrated into the class struggle (which in various places has already happened). The obstacle to be overcome is the material interest of the male worker to keep sexual division of labour at

home and at the work place as it is, at least as long as he takes the conditions and relations of production imposed by capitalism for granted.

One of the aspects of sexual division of labour which has not yet been sufficiently analysed is the tendency of patriarchy to impose the division between manual and mental labour along sex-lines, *i.e.*, within the family and also within the class there is a tendency to withhold education (not only formal but any form of mental development and articulation) from women—a tendency which in turn reinforces existing sexual divisions of labour. This point is important to be worked out since Marx deals with it only in an indirect way. After dealing with “spontaneous” or natural division of labour between the sexes in *German Ideology*, Marx sees the real division of labour as the one between mental and manual labour.

He then explains that the family is the first locus of property where women and children are slaves of the husband, and goes on to say that division of labour and private property are in fact *identical* expressions. Thus, by implication, the division of labour between manual and mental labour is clearly informed by patriarchal relations, being based on the appropriation of the family members and their labour by the patriarch. This is important because, despite this property relationship being abolished under capitalism legally, it has not ceased to exist economically and socially in a vast majority of cases. Even “educated” wives are still treated as their husbands’ property but at least formal access to education has helped a section of women to protest publicly this property relation. This relationship is nowadays frequently expressed in violence and dowry deaths where the woman becomes a side dish, and a disposable one, to the main fare of property transfer in the form of dowry. Since dowry and dowry deaths are rapidly invading the working class, such protest is relevant beyond class barriers.

To summarise, it can be said that the impact of patriarchy on the sexual division of labour inside and outside the house, in household labour and other subsistence production and in social production, accounts for the double exploitability of women under capitalism in the sphere of labour, sexuality and fertility. The use values which a woman produces in the house are to a large extent for husband and children; her wage is spent in a much greater proportion on the subsistence needs of the family than the husband’s.<sup>42</sup>



Besides, women often being employed in menial jobs and at wages "complementary" to the family wage, they are generally more exploited than men, suffering to a larger extent from their role as reserve army, and having a longer working day due to the "double role".

Women's sexuality gets appropriated in a triple way under capitalism: by their husbands,<sup>43</sup> in many cases at the place of work, and also by the media and in advertising where women's bodies are directly used to enhance profits in marketing. This also entails the direct marketing of women's bodies in the flesh trade and in pornography, peep shows etc.

Women's fertility is controlled by the husband, by the drug industries, by the propaganda of religious institutions, by the state in the form of family planning programmes and abortion laws, and by conditions laid down by institutions like World Bank, IMB, Ford Foundation etc. Since sexual and fertility control are crucial to maintain household and wage labour, actions of women to control their own bodies (sexuality and fertility) cannot be seen as extra-economic but have a direct bearing on the relations of production. The importance of such actions launched by women's groups, therefore, needs to be acknowledged and such issues should be incorporated in the class struggle as well.

### *Material and Social Base of Women's Subordination: Against Biologism*

Most of the discussions on the origins of women's subordination start from the passage in *German Ideology* where Marx states the three basic premises of the historical process, namely, first of all, satisfaction of basic needs<sup>44</sup> like eating, drinking, housing, clothing and various other things—in other words, the production of material life itself. Secondly, "the action of satisfying and the instrument of satisfaction which has been acquired, leads to new needs, and this creation of new needs is the first historical act". The third basic premise is the propagation of the species which creates a relation between man and woman, parents and children, the family. These three aspects have always existed simultaneously. Marx goes on to add the following important specification: "The production of life, both one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a two-fold relation: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relation—social in the sense that it denotes the co-operation of several individuals, no matter

under what conditions, in what manner and to which end. It follows from this that a certain mode of production, or industrial state, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation, or social stage, and this mode of co-operation is itself a 'production force'.<sup>45</sup>

The important point here is that production of life implies both subsistence production for one's own needs and procreation, and that the division of labour in any mode of production (comprising also the propagation of the species) is a productive force. Much debate has arisen on the question to what extent division of labour in the family and in social production has to be characterised as "natural" or to what extent it is "social". The tendency has been to accuse Marx of looking at the division of labour in the family as predominantly natural.<sup>46</sup> However, Marx mentions in the passage of *German Ideology* as "natural" or spontaneous only factors like physical strength, needs, accidents, and goes on to reflect upon consciousness and the appearance of division of material and mental labour. This division of labour, which is at the same time an expression of an unequal distribution of property, also entails the ownership of wife and children by the husband, which is, in other words, not a natural but a conscious social process. Yet, it is true that Marx neither analyses how women's subjugation was brought about nor why it happened. The same is true for the much more extensive analysis of Engels on the origin of the family where he pointed out a correspondence between the emergence of the monogamous patriarchal family and private property and class society. I agree with Chhaya Datar when she says "... he only answered the question 'when' it occurred, but he did not attempt to answer the question 'how' it occurred and 'why' women got dominated by men and why not the other way round".<sup>47</sup>

There is indeed a certain tendency towards biologism in the more "orthodox" Marxist statements on this matter. Usha Menon, for example, makes a general statement that "due to the women's biological role as mother, generally her contribution to social production under all modes of production in class society has been less than that of the man".<sup>48</sup> I feel that there are two faults in this statement which make it untenable: Menon projects the strict division between social production and what has been termed the production process back into history while, in fact, it is basically a capitalist phenomenon. She then goes on to ascribe biological reasons to it. In reality, the problem is not that woman has *produced*



less (which is not the case if one includes production of life in the analysis) but that her labour, her sexuality and her fertility have been appropriated by men throughout history since the beginning of class society. Menon makes a similar statement to explain the subordination of women under capitalism: "As long as labour-power is produced as a commodity, it is necessary for the capitalist that there exists a 'reserve army of labour', so that the price of labour can be low. Women form a most convenient and pliant part of this reserve army. This is so because the woman's biological role as mother, expanded to make her the sole nurturer and reinforced by the dogma that 'the woman's place is in the home', makes it possible to push her out of the labour force with the least resistance and political consequences."<sup>49</sup> She then admits that, under exceptional cases, this role of reserve army can also be taken over by other groups, for example, migrant labour. Yet, she does not fully unmask the fact that most of the assumptions on the "biological role" of women are an ideology which serves to keep women primarily concerned with subsistence production (*i.e.*, procreation and production of use-values to replenish the species), while, at the same time, using her labour power for other production purposes as well.

I agree with Menon when she says: "With the development of the productive forces and the possibility of the shortening of the working day, the objective conditions for the removal of the subordination of women arise. With the shortening of the working day for both men and women, it becomes possible for women to play an equal role in social production by combining it with the work of motherhood and for men to share in the work of bringing up children."<sup>50</sup> Yet, development of productive forces does not necessarily bring about shortening of the working day, and shortening of the working day does not automatically bring about participation of men in household labour. What really has to be overcome in the struggle against capitalism is not only class antagonism in the production process and in property relations but also sexual division of labour inside and outside the house (which is possible apart from the process of pregnancy and giving birth itself in which, however, men can participate, if so desired by women, to a larger extent than was formerly thought possible). With the acknowledgement that production of life is an indispensable condition for any further production process, the priority of production of wage goods over any other form of production has to be ques-

tioned. Envisaging the new society, we do face not only the question of how to achieve production in free association but also what has been termed "reproduction" in free association. The latter question to me seems more important than merely the abolition of the term reproduction, as has been demanded by various feminists.

Still, clarification is needed on the "why" and "how" of women's subordination.<sup>51</sup> In primitive society, women were faced with the need to produce for their own needs as well as for those of their children, since fatherhood became identifiable only at a rather late stage in human history and was fully established only with patriarchy. Maria Mies makes the point that women were experiencing their whole body as productive, not only their head and hand. Their understanding of their generative forces corresponded to their acquisition of knowledge about the generative forces of external nature, about plants, water, air, animals. Many anthropologists today maintain that women discovered early agriculture and first developed skills like weaving, pottery and knowledge about the medicinal value of plants. Mies suggests that women's relationship with nature was not based on appropriation and dominance, while men as hunters were extractive of nature. This may be a somewhat idealistic view in the sense that it constructs ideal types which need not have existed in this form *i.e.*, there is no reason to assume that because women discovered agriculture, men were not involved in it or that women did not hunt small game.

But indeed, as a general tendency, there is a difference in the way women and men relate to nature. It is also true that being productive is, for a man, necessarily much more related to tools than for a woman. Mies ascribes the tools of cultivation to women and the tools of hunting to men. Full-fledged patriarchal relations probably came into being with pastoral nomads who domesticated cattle and women, invading agricultural communities and subjugating unarmed men and women. This also created a base for slavery. Besides, cattle breeding presupposed the discovery of fatherhood and made the expansion of property relatively easy. Weapons became crucial in acquiring "surplus" from other communities,<sup>52</sup> and also to acquire the production performed by women. Thus, both class relations and patriarchal relations are, from the beginning, exploitative. The specific character of women's exploitation is that they are productive not only as producers but also as procreators. Research on food gathering and hunting has shown



that women provide up to 60% of the subsistence product because hunting is a more erratic activity. The problem is that throughout history the tendency was to confine women to subsistence production in order to enable men to achieve the real accumulation. Chhaya Datar, therefore, makes an important point in reading Engels the other way round. While Engels maintains that subordination of women was based on exclusion of women from public production, Datar maintains that women's subsistence productivity was so important to men they coerced women to stick to it, and acquired ownership of women and their production and excluded them from public life.<sup>53</sup> In capitalism, women entered public production because the new way to surplus production and appropriation required a larger work force but patriarchy permeated the relations of production all the same.

It seems to be very important to read this analysis of Maria Mies and Chhaya Datar in a historical and non-biologistic way because, otherwise, one can easily end up with dividing the world into goodies (women) and badies (men); on the one hand those concerned with "production of life" (women) and, on the other hand, those who are involved in extraction, destruction, exploitation (men), and all this by natural inclination. It is, therefore, important to emphasize that men and women have acquired the largest part of their sex-specific social characteristics in the historical process. It is also important to acknowledge that development of the productive forces was made possible through domination of nature and people, and was crucial for the development of human society. Besides, women, where they got access to property and political power, were able to turn into exploiters. Men on the other hand, were able to develop sharing and caring qualities.

Keeping these specifications in mind, we have to acknowledge that we have reached a point in history where a drastic rethinking and restructuring of human civilisation as a whole is needed. This has to comprise not only property relations and relations of production, but also a restructuring of human production (both public production and procreation) as a whole. Subsistence production under the capitalist mode of production has been more and more marginalised and trivialised. This has led to a situation where human subsistence and existence—not only of individuals but of humanity as a whole—is at stake. The very fact that subsistence has been made "private" and quasi "outside the capitalist mode of production" has led to a situation where human beings

become dispensable to the extent of making 80% of the work force superfluous by chips-technology or risking a "limited nuclear war". Exploitation of nature has reached a point at which capitalists cease to be bothered whether any resources will be left for generations to come. The point, therefore, is not "to strengthen subsistence production" for the sake of women's liberation as some feminists demand (whatever they may have in mind by it) but to make human subsistence a central public issue. This would for example, mean a forest policy in which the day to day needs of people do not get subordinated to industrial needs, subsistence oriented water allotment, and basic, preventive and wholistic health care not being neglected in favour of highly specialized medicine etc. It would no doubt mean radical disarmament. Of course, the fight against capitalism is crucial in fighting the threat to human survival, but socialism so far has not been able to come fully into its own due to competition with capitalism, including the problem of arms race. Therefore, the movements which fight for the subsistence of humankind like the peace movements, the ecological movement and the women's movement are of great importance, and their insights and issues have to be incorporated into the class struggle as well as into the theory of society within the actually existing socialism.

### *Perspectives of Women's Liberation and Class Struggle*

The preceding analysis has shown that antagonism between women's liberation and class struggle is artificial and unfortunate. The women's question cannot be solved within capitalism and therefore the women's movement needs to ally itself with class struggle. At the same time, socialism cannot solve the women's question automatically. Without the existence of the autonomous women's movement, much analysis would never have been produced, and many women who developed an anti-capitalist perspective in the meantime, would never have been drawn into a struggle had it not been on women's issues like abortion, health care, rape or dowry. On the other hand, communist women's organisations which managed to organise large numbers of women during the independence struggle, lost many of them again most likely due to the fact that they were not able to tackle "women's issues".<sup>54</sup>

How women's liberation and class struggle can be successfully integrated with each other is a question which has to be solved practically under very varying local conditions and it has also to



be worked out theoretically in greater depth. Certainly, class differences have to be acknowledged within the autonomous women's movement and patriarchal divisions within the Left. It is not a matter of subordinating the one to the other or solving the one problem first and the other automatically following suit.

The problem at hand is part and parcel of the question of revolutionary organisation as a whole, *i.e.*, it comprises, on the one hand, the aspect of the relationship between party and mass organisation but it also comprises, on the other hand, the wider question of how the working class movement can efficiently incorporate issues which go beyond its own class interest. I am not going along with the tendency, fashionable in the West-European left, to drop class struggle or the revolutionary role of the working class, but I am raising the question how the hegemony of the working class in a mass movement of Left and Democratic forces for the survival of human kind, and thus by necessity against capitalism, can be achieved. It is only in this wider context that the question of "autonomy", as distinct from "separateness", can be worked out and a fruitful co-operation between working class organisations and women's organisations of various types can be achieved. As a matter of course, the question of left unity as well, will have to be solved in this process.

## 5 Dalit Movements and Women's Movements

The following is an attempt to draw on some experiences of women's movements in Tamil Nadu and to raise analytical questions which may help to draw conclusions from such experiences. The focus of this attempt is the interface between patriarchy, the caste system and untouchability. More specifically, incidents of violence against women will be analysed and the perception of this violence by caste leaders and by women in the women's movement. This will lead to certain conceptual questions which have a bearing on our strategies. Feminist and Dalit conceptualisations will be looked into. The practical questions which are involved are the relationship between women's movements and Dalit movements, and how cases of violence against Dalit women should be taken up.

I see a tendency in women's movements to play down the caste factor and to emphasise the unity among women as victims of violence. While a certain basic understanding has been developed that control over women and control over lower castes are connected, the question of untouchability has not been thoroughly confronted. There has also been an underlying assumption that, if patriarchy is tackled, caste will be weakened automatically. This has often led to a preoccupation with an argument against Brahminism and to a certain romanticisation of low caste and tribal culture, while at the same time the actual situation of Dalit women is not confronted. At the same time, Dalit movements, while aware of women's oppression in general, tend to emphasise that Dalit women suffer a violence which is in a category of its own and needs therefore to be taken up as a caste issue.

Both positions are valid and based on experience. It is true that violence against women cuts across caste and class, especially in an urban context. However, the circumstances differ. Cases of dowry connected with torture and murder are more frequent among upper castes and it is probably not exaggerated to say that



family violence among upper castes tends to be quite systematic. This type of systematised family violence occurs much less among backward castes and Dalits unless they have become economically prosperous and try to imitate upper caste values, which is very rare. Dalit women are not under the ideology of husband-worship and if they face violence within the family, they may fight back.

However, they face the collective threat of physical harm from upper caste forces all the time. Against such violence, the men of the Dalit community can often not "protect their women" and it is therefore perceived as a collective weakness and vulnerability. At the same time, such violence is often taken as "normal" and rape cases tend to be compromised or cheaply compensated in an overall bargain to settle the caste issue. Women have hardly any say in such matters. If one asks why such women do not turn to the women's movement, the answer is probably that women's movements in most cases are not a permanently felt presence in rural areas, where physical assault on women is a "normal" occurrence. Even if the women's movement is present, it may not be seen as trustworthy since it is seen as not taking caste issues seriously. At the same time, Dalit leaders may have their own patriarchal interests in using or suppressing an assault on a woman. The net result of this situation is often that Dalit women may end up doubly deserted, without support from their own kith and kin and also not reached by support from the women's movement.

To explain the situation, I would like to give some concrete examples. I am aware that all the cases which I am dealing with are much too complex to be adequately dealt with in a brief essay. I am, therefore, confining myself mainly to those features which throw light on the relationship between caste and patriarchy.

## CASE STUDIES

### 1. *The Bodi Riots*

In September-October 1989 the areas of Bodinayakanur, Thevaram, Theni, Allinagaram and Usilampatti, south-west of Madurai towards the Kerala border, were rocked by caste violence, mainly between Thevars and Pallars, which led to a massive loss of life and property. The Bodi riots have been widely reported in the daily news papers.<sup>1</sup> However, the press has been under pressure since Bodi is the constituency of Jayalalitha, the Tamil Nadu A-DMK

leader who was heading the opposition. This led to hectic activities of both DMK and A-DMK in the area. The conflict turned into a campaign against the Pallar leader John Pandyan who was accused of inciting communal violence and was arrested and jailed for over one month.

There are two incidents which triggered off the Bodi riots. The crucial incident was the murder of a Dalit woman, Muthupillai, aged around 50 who had gone to collect firewood on 9 September. There are different versions about the murder. Some say she was murdered by a Pillaimar who was identified but declared insane by the police and let go. Others say that a group of three or four Thevars raped and murdered the woman of whom one was identified and confessed in public.

However, no arrests were made. Not only that, the Bodi rural police station refused to take the complaint of Muthupillai's relatives and the same happened to them in three other police stations. This led to delay in the disposal of the body. The Dalits threatened to picket buses and only then the DSP of Theni agreed to register a case. However, since the official version was that the murderer had been insane, no further action was taken. The Dalits were infuriated by police inaction.

Another incident which created tension was the visit of the Handloom Minister, Thangavelu (DMK), to Meenakshipuram for a loan distribution scheme on 8 September, the day preceding the murder. Since he belongs to their caste, the Dalits of the area wanted to give him a big reception as this was his first visit after becoming Minister. However, Panchayat President Raju Pillai (A-DMK) refused them the public road and the use of *mela* (drums) for the purpose. Besides, the Dalits had many grudges against the panchayat president already since they felt he had withheld basic amenities from them.

On 10 September John Pandian, leader of the Thevendrakula Vellala Sangam, an organisation of the Pallars, was called to mediate. He came out with a blistering attack on the non-Dalits. In his attack the offence against the minister and the murder of the woman got connected. He especially attacked Panchayat President Raju Piallai and incited the Dalits to ask for his daughter in marriage. If he would not give her, she should be taken and carried off. This created an uproar among the Pillaimars and Thevars and was taken as a blatant call to communal violence.

From 12 September onwards, notices against John Pandian's



speech appeared, demanding the arrest of John Pandian. Tensions ran high and on 15 September Pon Muthuramalinga, DMK minister and a Thevar by caste, came to mediate. The Dalits rendered an official apology but the demand for Johan Pandian's arrest persisted. Communal riots broke out on the night of 16 September and carried on for a week, leaving 30 people dead, many more injured, and lakhs of property damaged. John Pandian was arrested on 16 September and stayed in jail till October 26th.

What is highly disturbing about these events is that the murder and mutilation of Muthupillai could neither be properly investigated nor prosecuted. It has not been taken seriously as a murder case, nor has it been seen as an incitement to communal violence in any way. However, the speeches of John Pandian have been identified as a clear case of incitement to communal violence. Some of the Dalits have been trying to take the line that John Pandian was only advocating inter-caste marriage. It is interesting to see how S. Ganeshram in *Economic and Political Weekly* has analysed John Pandian's speech, emphasising in this article his violent ways and criminal record during his political life:

He called upon Harijans to seek brides from non-Harijans and if this was not conceded, to abduct the girls by force and marry them. Thus, he hoped to get social equality for Harijans, which created tension among the non-Harijans. But he failed to realise the fact that social equality cannot be achieved in this caste-ridden society by marrying a non-Harijan girl. In fact inter-caste marriages themselves have served to kindle communal tensions.<sup>2</sup>

The logic of this argument seems to be that aspiration to equality is seen as an incitement of communal violence. This view is held even by a reporter who tries to give an impartial picture. The problem here is that the verbal assault of John Pandian (who is certainly patriarchal and violent in his expression) has been taken to be a more grievous injury than the actual murder and mutilation of the Dalit woman Muthupillai. At the same time, when the posters attacking John Pandian also used abusive language against Dalit women, no offence or incitement to communal violence was recognised in this.

It is disturbing that in the case of the Bodi riots no women's movement was in a position to come forward, take up the case of

Muthupillai and at the same time record the effects of the communal clash on women. We also have to reflect on the fact that control over the women of a community is an integral part of establishing superiority—so much so that the Dalit community is forced into rape fantasies. At the same time, the expression of these rape fantasies is prosecuted with much more vigour than the actual rapes and murders inflicts on Dalits. The reason for this is obviously the fact that even the fantasy is perceived as posing a lethal threat to the perpetuation of the caste system, while the actually ongoing rapes and murders are perpetuating it. It seems to be extremely difficult to extricate women from this patriarchal caste dominance and to help them to develop a non-violent resistance against it which would reach out across caste lines.

## *2. The Allalaperi Issue*

Allalaperi<sup>3</sup> is a separate unit (*uratchi*) of Kariapatti Panchayat in Kamaraj District of Central Tamil Nadu. It was inhabited by 33 Dalit families and about 100 Theval families (Agamudayar) which belong to the Mukkulathur community. The Thevars own between 5–15 acres of land while the Dalits who are Parayars have half an acre to 2 acres. The Parayars work also as agricultural coolies and make baskets from the leaves of the palmyra tree. Among the Parayars, one leader, Guruswami, owned a bit of land and refused to employ coolie labour. He was arguing for self-respect and dignity among the Dalits. His daughter Panchavaran (12 years) was raped on 1 September 1989 by one Sivan (19 years) of the Agamudayar community, while she grazed goats. Against the custom, Gurusamy filed a police complaint at the Kariapatty police station. However, since no medical report had been taken, the complaint was only of molestation and attempted rape.

The village panchayat held a meeting, reproaching Guruswami for going to the police. They also imposed restriction on the Dalits such as not to wear chappals, not to ride a bicycle etc. The Dalits, therefore, refused the carrying of dead bodies of animals and humans and also the announcing of death by drumming. The protracted conflict was aggravated on 21 May 1990 when a small girl of the Thevar community died and one Alagu of the Dalits refused to announce the death since it was midnight. He was slapped, and he complained to the police who took no action.

Again, a panchayat meeting was held which refused the Dalits the use of the common pump. They were also refused articles from



shops and were told not to use the straight road to their locality but to go around. On 19 June 1990 one Mahalingam was attacked while he used the road. The police took no action on the complaint.

On 7 July 1990, the Ambedkar Centenary was celebrated in Kariapatty with Guruswamy as the main speaker. He told how the Thevars were trying to make him withdraw the police complaint against the rape of his daughter. He said: "If our daughters are raped and we report, we will be offered 100 rupees and be expected to accept that. But will high caste people accept if we offer Rs. 100? If a high caste girl is raped, will the police remain inactive in this way? Now, who will marry my daughter? Why doesn't the boy come forward and marry her? Then we will have interdining (*samapandi*)."

That night, stones were thrown on Dalit homes.

Actually Gurusamy only appealed to the popular ethics that a rapist should marry the girl and thus legalise the 'relationship'. Besides, he was talking of an Anuloma alliance, the boy being of a higher caste. Nevertheless, the Thevars were outraged.

On the 3 August, the Dalits went to a festival at the Kaliammal temple for which they had to cross the Thevar street. Due to this, there was an attack on the Dalit families. Guruswamy and many others escaped but three Dalits who were trying to catch the bus to file a police complaint were caught and beaten all night. Thevar women, in solidarity with their caste, lay on the road to stop the bus in which they were trying to go. One of the three captives was Gurusamy's son, Muthumari. On the same night, 4 Thevars got hold of Gurusamy's newly married daughter-in-law, Bakkiam, locked her up and gang raped her, leaving her only the next morning. Another woman, Mallika, was also raped when she went to her house to fetch a few things.

Leaders of the IDLM (Integrated Dalit Liberation Movement) printed and pasted posters against police inaction very soon after the incident. They were arrested under Section 295 (incitement of communal riots). Another factor in their arrest had been the organising and preparation of a function on 15 August (Independence Day) to distribute chappals to Dalits in the presence of the District Collector. This could not take place.

By 10 August the Dalit Movement decided to appeal to Pennurimai Iyakkam, an autonomous women's movement among slum dwellers in Madurai, to take up the case. Pennurimai Iyakkam was the first outside force which was able to enter the area and investigate the case and talk to the S.P. and other authorities. The

fact that the composition of Pennurimai Iyakkam is across caste lines and the team itself had Dalits and Thevars as well as others was crucial at this moment. Other forces involved were SCALM, Puratchi Kavinyar Peravai, Students Islamic Union, and the Indian People's Front. Pennurimai Iyakkam made it clear that it was only prepared to take the issue if guarantee was given that the rape cases will not be withdrawn or compromised. This was agreed.

Under the tension, 26 Dalit families migrated to Karuvelampatti in Madurai district, even though they had to leave their land behind. Peace talks were held. On 27 August negotiations were held between the authorities and the people supported by different movements. On 28 August the 26 families returned to Kariapatti in Kamaraj district and are now resettled there with Government assistance. Apart from getting house pattas and assistance for house construction, Rs. 500 for the injured was also paid. They have lost their land in Allalapori but got a livelihood from basket making.

This settlement is unique in the history of caste conflicts in the area. As far as the rape case is concerned, Guruswamy and his wife supported the raped daughter-in-law. This was due to the fact that people had started blaming Guruswamy for confronting the Thevars and making their life more difficult. Being affected by rape in his own family was seen as an atonement for the hardships he had brought upon others. However, his son, who was newly married and had been beaten up, could not face the rape of his wife. To him a version was upheld that the rape was only attempted.

This means that even though involvement of the women's movement was crucial in settling the case and preventing it from spreading into a riot, it did not imply that Dalit women themselves would be really strengthened. They remained under the patriarchal controls of their caste. It was also not possible to build women's unity across caste lines in the locality itself. At the same time, the slum dwellers in different areas in Madurai who were informed about the issue, wholeheartedly supported the intervention across caste lines, even though many of them are Thevars.

This indicates that in times of relative peace such unity can be built. Women even pointed out that caste interests are a male affair and only men wear caste names. However, in situations of confrontation, support to one's own community can become a priority. At the same time, Dalit leaders recognised that they were unable to resolve the case on a caste base and needed wider support. It was



also an extraordinary success that this issue could be contained and did not spread into a wider riot. Only property was lost but not lives. Women's suffering got recorded and publicised fairly adequately. It was also understood that the existence and intervention of the women's movement was crucial in compelling the authorities to take action.

The above two cases dealt with the experiences of Dalit women who suffer rape and murder as part of an ongoing caste confrontation. As Justice Bhagawati pointed out in an address to the Maharashtra State Women's Council in 1986, "rape is increasingly becoming a form of caste war".<sup>4</sup> It is, indeed, this aspect which we in the women's movement have to confront with great seriousness. At the same time, there is also a definite need for Dalit movements to develop a deeper understanding of patriarchy. The above two cases have shown how the collective mechanism with which rape cases are taken remains entirely patriarchal and often enough enhances the danger of further rapes. This patriarchal frame of mind can be illustrated more clearly in two cases which were handled by the Rural Women's Liberation Movement in Arakkonam.

### 3. *Experience Near Arakkonam*

Arakkonam<sup>5</sup> in North Arcot District of Tamil Nadu is an area with a high percentage of Dalit landless labourers, most of them Parayars. In the recent past, Ambedkar Mantrams have spread rapidly and efforts are being made to rename North Arcot as Ambedkar District. The Rural Women's Liberation Movement (RWLM) has the majority of its members from the landless agricultural labourers who are Dalits. It has worked together with the Landless Labourers Movement which has tried to take up wage issues as well as issues of use of resources (land, water) across caste lines. While there have been ideological differences between the Dalit organisations, the Landless Labourers Movement (LLM), and the RWLM because of differences on the caste/class nexus, there has been cooperation on some local issues and on festive occasions like Ambedkar's birthday.

In the recent past, there have been two cases where the relationship between the women's movement and the Ambedkar Mantrams came under real strain. On 20 April 1990, a twenty-five year old woman named Kala, mother of 3 children, committed suicide by throwing herself in front of a train. The activists from

The RWLM contacted the parents and went with them to the hospital to see the body. On investigation it turned out that the husband had an extra-marital affair and was ill treating his wife continuously. The parents were prepared to witness to these facts. However, since husband and wife were Parayars, representatives of the Ambedkar Movement were present at the hospital. The village president, who is an advocate and legal advisor of the Ambedkar Movement, pressurised the parents to make a statement that Kala was deaf and mentally disturbed and that nobody was responsible for her death.

The postmortem was inconclusive. The RWLM was trying to file a case of abetment to suicide, but Kala's husband and his family managed to convince the panchayat president to hold a panchayat which absolved the husband of any responsibility. While the RWLM publicly denounced the husband and the panchayat president, the Ambedkar Movement supported the president and the husband and helped them to burn the body. The panchayat president tried with a group of Ambedkar Mantram members to appease the RWLM members and to move them to drop the issue. However, they gheraoed his office on 27 April. On 28 April the advocate organised some 200 Ambedkar Mantram youth for a processio

RWLM managed to get together with Ambedkar Mantram members arguing with them that they had supported issues of atrocity against Dalits but if a Dalit woman is driven to death by her Dalit husband, no justice will be done. After this, a certain understanding was reached, but the case did not stand legally.

The other case was the rape of Kalpana, a three-year-old daughter of Sri Lankan repatriates by a Dalit neighbour on 7 July 1990. The act was discovered by the parents and soiled cloth with semen was secured but medical examination did not take place. The Ambedkar Mantram of Attupakkam conducted a Panchayat and decided on a fine of Rs. 250. They also accompanied the rapist to the RWLM office to prevent them from taking up the case. After a heated argument, they left the women activists to report the matter to the police. On 14th July a public meeting was organised to demand justice for Kalpana. A break-away group of the Ambedkar Mantram supported the issue.

While these strains persist, the Ambedkar Movement seeks help from the RWLM in cases of inter-caste violence. The Ambedkar Mantrams themselves are entirely male dominated. While women



participate in mobilisation, they are not represented in any decision making bodies.

### UNDERLYING CONCEPTUALISATIONS

To go into underlying conceptualisations is a very difficult task since these are unavoidably linked up with interests of movements on the one hand and with views on very ancient history on the other which are often difficult to establish. As such, the following explorations can only be very tentative.

#### *1. In the Women's Movement*

I would like to start with the perceptions which enabled the members of Pennurimai Iyakkam to interact with the Allalaperi issue. The overall outlook of the movement is very much expressed in the words of the poet Bharathiar:

Nobody is poor or a slave by birth [i.e. by "Nature"].  
There is no degraded human being in India;  
Joyfully we will have education and wealth,  
All people will live together as equals...

These lines from the song "*Viduthalai*" are often sung by the women in the movement. However, in the concrete experience of daily life, caste and class exploitation and thus disadvantage "by birth" are very much a reality. There was an awareness that even in the struggles for housing and basic amenities which the movement promotes, Dalit women are more marginalised and subdued than others. At the same time there is a vivid awareness of goonda violence and threat of gang rape in many of the areas, both among Dalits and non-Dalits.

Therefore, when the IDLM approached Pennurimai Iyakkam, there was no hesitation to take the issue. There was no reluctance also to take a clear stand with the plight of Dalit women from women of other castes. This had probably to do with the fact that through practical activities and handling of cases, the connection between systematised family violence in upper castes and collective violence against Dalit women had become quite visible. There is also no romanticism about relative sexual freedom among low castes here, since the other side of that coin is clearly enhanced sexual harrassment from other men, be it at the work place (e.g.

among construction workers) or in caste clashes. Besides, Thevar women are aware of female infanticide in their own caste.

While in the clash of Bodi, in the face of Dalit gang rape fantasies, exploited and whipped up to the maximum by Thevar men, women got subsumed under the caste structure and they also helped "their men" in the clash of Allalaperi. Thevar women and other middle castes have ample reasons for common cause with other women outside the situation of acute caste clash. There is a strong intuitive perception that male authority is the bedrock of caste. This is often encountered when the movement runs negotiations in which "women panchayats" have to face caste panchayats. There is, therefore, also a feeling that women can overcome caste cleavages much more easily than patriarchal caste forces. Theories about the origin of caste are not much in the picture except that Brahmin values are held in contempt for obvious reasons. I would now like to explore some of the conceptualisations current in the women's movement in India on the relationship between patriarchy and caste.

To characterise the situation, it may be useful to start with the analysis of Joanna Liddle and Ram Joshi in their book *Daughters of Independence*<sup>6</sup> which is subtitled "Gender, Caste and Class in India". The authors argue that there was a pre-Aryan "matriarchal" culture which was basically egalitarian and free from caste. The matrilineal culture of the Nayers in Kerala is taken to be a remnant of this stratum as well as matriliney and matrilocality in the north-eastern tribes. This culture is stated to have been destroyed by the Aryan invasions which are accountable for having established the caste system as well as control over women's sexuality. Later, Brahmin codifications, especially in the Smritis, are said to have tightened the controls.

The position is argued as follows: "At first there was no caste consciousness, no hereditary occupations and no rules about marriage within the class. The development of this form of social organisation into a caste structure was a slow process which only began when the Aryans, having established dominance over the native population around 15 B.C. began to class the indigenous people and those of mixed descent as outsiders, relegating them to a fourth category of Sudras (servants) and excluding them from Vedic religion."<sup>7</sup>

The real tight differentiation is then seen as having occurred in response to the power struggle between Brahmins and Kshatriyas,



the reforms introduced by Jainism and Buddhism and the protests by Vaishyas and Shudras.<sup>8</sup> The final decline was then seen to have occurred around 500 A.D. when child marriage, the ban on widow remarriage and Sati were practiced among the upper castes, especially Kshatriyas.<sup>9</sup>

There are various problems with this view of history:

1. It comes close to an inverted racial theory of Aryan invasions vs. Dravidian and proto-Dravidian cultures which has been questioned by modern historians like Romila Thapar,<sup>10</sup> by anthropological research on caste, and by Dr. Ambedkar in his writings on caste. Ambedkar brands the invasion theory as a racist, colonial, Western invention, eagerly taken over and promoted by Brahmin scholars.<sup>11</sup>

2. The position is argued only at the level of *varna*, and therefore the authors cannot go into the actual functioning of *jatis* and subcastes which is much more complicated. For example, the Nayers, who are seen to be matriarchal and egalitarian, practiced severe untouchability not only towards untouchables but also towards the Nadars whose women were forbidden to wear the upper cloth.<sup>12</sup>

3. The analysis also leaves out completely the panchavarnas or untouchables. It clubs untouchables and Adivasis with the Shudras and thus neglects the violence between the Shudras and the "lower" sections. It also tends to romanticise low caste culture as being free from sexual controls and does not enable us to get an understanding of patriarchy as it functions in low caste, outcaste and Adivasi culture, often in response to collective patriarchal violence from the upper castes.

4. While the basic thrust of the analysis is to establish linkages between caste and patriarchy, the argument remains stuck in a polemic against Brahmin ideology and especially sexual controls. It does not explore the communality of interest between women and Dalits into which I think we need to go. This will be taken up after discussing Dalit positions.

A second position which stands out is that of Ruth Manorama, an activist of Women's Voice, a slum based mass organisation in Bangalore with a high percentage of Dalit members. Ruth is also active in the Christian Dalit Liberation Movement. Due to her double commitment to the cause of women and of Dalits, she has been untiring in highlighting the cause of Dalit women who she describes as "the thrice alienated", by class, patriarchy and caste.<sup>13</sup>

While Ruth's analysis goes to a large extent along with the above summarised position of Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi in that she sees Aryan invasion and racial theory as the cause of caste and caste specific forms of patriarchy, she goes beyond Varna and has the concrete functioning of *jati* and sub-caste in mind.

Her real contribution is to make the triple plight of Dalit women visible who, under conditions of grinding poverty and severe exploitation at the work place also suffer caste specific ban on water access and gang rape from upper castes, while at the same time they may be beaten up in their own houses as well. Dalit poet Teresamma, a teacher from Guntur, puts the situation into the following words:

We go to work for we are poor  
But the same silken beds mock us  
While we are ravished in broad daylight.  
Ill-starred our horoscopes are.  
Even our tottering husbands  
Lying on the cots in a corner  
Hiss and shout for revenge  
If we cannot stand their touch.<sup>14</sup>

This position is important since it confronts women in the women's movement as well as men in the Dalit movement with the real plight of Dalit women.

I would now like to go into a third position which, though it ultimately agrees with the invasion theory, also goes into discussing other possible origins of the caste system and works out with sharpness how subjugation of women is constitutive to the very existence of caste. Kalpana Kannabiran in her paper "Reconstructing Patriarchy"<sup>15</sup> addresses herself to the claim that feminism is irrelevant in India since the feminine power principle is built into Hindu society and has the sanction of religion. Her main argument in this paper is that "patriarchy is basic to the caste system and that the worship of the Goddess in no way contradicts the institutionalised oppression of women. All these seemingly contradictory facts are seen as existing in a continuum at different points and actively reinforcing and perpetuating oppression in various spheres of life. And the continuum viewed as a whole offers us the model of patriarchy with all its comcomitants in Hindu society".<sup>16</sup>

She draws heavily on Nripendra Kumar Dutt<sup>17</sup> whose defini-



tion of caste goes as follows: "Without attempting to make a comprehensive definition it may be stated that the most apparent features of the present day caste system are that the members of the different castes cannot have matrimonial connections with any but persons of their own caste, that there are restrictions, though not so rigid as in the matter of marriage, about a member eating and drinking with that of a different caste, that in many castes there are fixed occupations for different castes, that there is some hierarchical graduation among the castes, the most recognised position being that of Brahmins at the top; that birth alone decides a man's connection with his caste for life, unless expelled for violation of his caste rules, and that transition from one caste to another higher or lower is not possible. The prestige of the Brahman is the corner stone of the whole organisation."<sup>18</sup>

While the whole historical argument which Kalpana makes cannot be repeated here, I would like to restate two points of her analysis which I feel are very important.

1. She shows that subjugation of women into slavery is very ancient and can be traced back to Rigvedic hymns. She thus concludes that sexual subjugation and reification of women goes back to pre-Rig Vedic time. She concludes: "It is my thesis that patriarchy is in fact the basis of the caste system and that the patterns of hierarchy, power and authority which characterise the caste system are derived from earlier forms of gender based oppression."<sup>19</sup>

2. The second important point she makes is that incorporation of goddess-religion into Brahminic religion, especially in the Puranic text of the *Devi Mahatmya*, is a device to integrate the goddess into an androcentric patriarchal framework. This counters the claim that Hinduism is by itself feminist since it promotes goddess religion and shows how promotion of the goddess image can go together with enhanced caste restrictions on women.

The drawback with Kalpana's position is that, while it makes plausible that subjugation of women preceded *varna* and *jati*, it virtually suggests a monocausal explanation for the caste system. The question then remains why patriarchy, which has preceded slavery and class society in other parts of the world as well,<sup>20</sup> should have caused caste in India but not elsewhere. It may be useful at this point to go back to Kalpana's discussion on a different origin of the caste system, not based on the theory of invasion, which is represented by Morton Klass.<sup>21</sup>

Morton Klass sees *jati* and subcaste as fundamentally distinct

from *varna* and rejects both the racial theory and the invasion theory for the origin of caste. He sees caste mainly as a marriage circle which regulates the access to resources in the villages and the exchange of services. The crucial step in the creation of caste in his view is therefore that from tribal exogamy to caste endogamy. His view of the functioning of the caste system is not really contestable. It also tallies with N.K. Dutt's above mentioned definition. The ground on which Kalpana Kannabiran rejects Klass is solely Klass' contention that the marriage circle in itself is "egalitarian". She rightly points out that this does not account for hierarchy in terms of age and subjugation of women within the caste. While this point is well taken, it is not sufficient ground to reject Klass' thesis lock, stock, and barrel.

As Gail Omvedt has pointed out, Klass' is one of the most comprehensive and coherent explanations of the caste system ever developed.<sup>22</sup> It is also the only theory which explains why the caste system should be more rigid in the South than the North, which is not accounted for in the invasion theories. The theory, as Klass evolves it, does not rule out the history of invasions and conquest as such. He only rejects this history as a conclusive explanation for caste and also points out that warfare and subjugation was going on among Aryans and among Dravidians as well so that a case of subjugation of a homogeneous pre-Aryan population by a homogeneous Aryan race cannot be made. Thus, an argument needs to be made for a multi-causal explanation of caste and for a differentiated understanding of the caste specific functioning of patriarchy. I will come back to this point after going into some of the underlying Dalit conceptualisations on the relationship between caste and patriarchy.

## *2. Conceptualisations in the Dalit Movement*

Here, too, I would like to start with the perceptions of the Dalit activists involved in the above mentioned cases. As far as the Bodi riots are concerned, the investigations confined themselves to factual observations on the murder of Muttupillai. There was also a tendency to play down the remarks by John Pandyan and to see them as a simple aspiration for intermarriage. No investigation seems to have been made which would have established how Dalit women were specifically affected during the Bodi riots.

As far as the Allalaperi issue is concerned, an interesting shift in perceptions can be registered. The secretary of IDLM had in



numerous earlier discussions taken the line that patriarchy was a Brahmin invention and that, therefore, while upper caste women may be in need of the women's movement, Dalit women do not need it since they can fight patriarchy through the caste struggle. He pointed out that Dalit women had a high level of mobilisation but admitted that they were not in decision making bodies. However, he claimed that this could be changed easily. This was echoed by other Dalit activists who held that the women's movement was a middle class phenomenon which had no grasp of Dalit issues and that Dalit women were facing patriarchy only as an external phenomenon, not from within the caste.

This position had been challenged some weeks earlier during a workshop with Ruth Manorama who made a forceful plea for autonomy for Dalit women and demanded that the women's movement should take up the issues of Dalit women. When the Allalaperi issue cropped up, it had every potential to develop into a communal riot since the administration and the police were overwhelmingly manned by Thevars. To turn to other movements became virtually a matter of survival. Interaction with the women's movement has ruled out compromise on rape cases and has also challenged patriarchal terms of functioning like the leadership cult and undemocratic decision making. It has also raised the question of organisational representation of Dalit women.

Apart from such approaches to the handling of concrete incidents and to organisational questions, there is also a popular perception current which is something like the extension of the Dravidian notion of history.<sup>23</sup> The Dravidian movement, in a reversal of the Aryan myth, on the one hand maintained a theory of Aryan invasions which are seen as the cause of the caste system, and on the other hand the existence of an independently ruled Dravida Nadu upto the time of the British conquest.

Similarly, Dalit leaders trace caste to the Aryan conquest while at the same time claiming a continuous heritage of egalitarian culture among themselves. This includes the claim of a non-patriarchal cultural heritage which is not necessarily born out by facts either in the Dravidian or the Dalit movement. However, as Nasir Tyabji has pointed out, such claims can make their own contribution to social reform. At the same time, they seem to be non-consequential in moments of acute caste confrontations between Dalits and Backward Castes.

It may be useful at this point to go back to the writings of Dr.

Babasaheb Ambedkar which are strikingly different from these popularised Dravidian and Dalit versions of history. Unfortunately, Ambedkar, though aware of women's position in general, has not integrated his analysis of caste with an analysis of patriarchy. He confines himself to general observations like the following: "From time immemorial man, as compared with woman, has had the upper hand. He is a dominant figure in every group and of the two sexes has greater prestige. With this traditional superiority of man over woman his wishes have always been consulted. Woman, on the other hand, has been an easy prey to all kinds of iniquitous injunctions, religious, social or economic. But man, as a maker of injunctions, is most often above them all."<sup>24</sup>

While he sees a connection between social evils like *sati*, child marriage, ban on widow remarriage, caste and untouchability, his preoccupation is clearly with untouchability and caste. Yet, his writings are not only relevant to rethink drastically on racial theories of invasion, they also lend themselves for drawing further connections between caste and patriarchy and also for critical introspection, both among feminists and Dalits. While this is not the place to give a full summary of Dr. Ambedkar's theory on the origin of caste and untouchability as he evolved it over the decades, it may be useful to highlight some of the important features.

Even in his earliest writings, where Ambedkar debates with colonial theories of caste by authors like Senart, Nesfield and Risley, he rejects the racial theory and theories of conquest. He also sees division of labour only as an aspect but not as a root cause of caste. He argues that "critical evaluation of the various characteristics of caste leave no doubt that prohibition, or rather absence of intermarriage—endogamy, to be concise—is the only one that can be called the essence of caste when rightly understood".<sup>25</sup>

Surprisingly, he also does not see Brahmins as the imposers of the caste system. While there is no doubt that they promoted and propagated it in the shastras, they did not have, according to Ambedkar, the means of coercion to *impose* this system. "The Brahmins may have been guilty of many things, and I dare say they were, but imposing of the caste system on the non-Brahmin population was beyond their mettle. They may have helped the process by their glib philosophy, but they certainly could not have pushed their scheme beyond their own confines."<sup>26</sup>

He sees the process of endogamy as starting from the Brahmins but getting spread both by manipulation as well as imitation: some



closed the doors and some found them closed. He sees caste not as a direct continuity of *varna* but as a process of its own, consisting of the splitting up into endogamous units. He emphasises the role of imitation—both conscious and unconscious—in the process of the formation of caste.<sup>27</sup> In some of his later writings he goes into greater detail and rejects division of labour as a rationale for the caste system<sup>28</sup> as well as the argument of maintenance of “purity of blood”, since the system originated after mixing of populations had already taken place.<sup>29</sup> In his early writings of 1916 Ambedkar comes very close to Morton Klass’ version of seeing caste as a “marriage circle” which regulates access to resources as well as exchange of services based on territoriality and kinship.

Beyond economic aspects, this also allows for what some anthropologists have called analysis of “culture as an energy capturing system”<sup>30</sup> which comprises aspects of production, distribution and cultural exchange. In his later writings his focus shifts to a head-on attack on the Hindu religion as the ideological force which sanctifies the system. This comes after efforts to overcome caste by involvement in the working class movement.<sup>31</sup>

As far as the historical aspects are concerned, Ambedkar not only sees a major difference between *varna* and caste as a marriage circle, he also sees untouchability as having come into being at a much later stage than the rules of purity and pollution. His thesis on untouchability is summarised as follows:

1. There is no racial difference between Hindus and Untouchables.

2. This distinction between the Hindus and Untouchables in its original form, before the advent of Untouchability, was the distinction between Tribesmen and Broken Men from alien tribes. It is the Broken Men who subsequently came to be treated as Untouchables.

3. Just as Untouchability has no racial basis so also it has no occupational basis.

4. There are two roots from which Untouchability has sprung: (a) Contempt and hatred of the Broken Men as of Buddhists by the Brahmins; and (b) continuation of beef-eating by the Broken Men after it has been given up by others.

5. In searching for the origin of Untouchability care must be taken to distinguish the Untouchables from the Impure. All orthodox Hindu writers have identified the Impure with the Untouchables. This is an error. Untouchables are distinct from the Impure.

6. While the Impure as a class come into existence at the time of the Dharma Sutras, the Untouchables come into being much later than 400 AD.<sup>32</sup>

### *Concluding Observations*

Where does this leave us as far as the relationship between caste and patriarchy is concerned? And what does it mean for our approach to the life problems of Dalit women? Some observations may be in order which can help us to deepen our understanding further.

1. As far as the functioning of caste is concerned, the primary emphasis of Dr. Ambedkar and Morton Klass on caste as a marriage circle is certainly the crucial aspect. Without endogamy, caste cannot be maintained. However, even if intermarriage takes place, patriarchy needs to be abolished since otherwise the woman will be subsumed under the husband's caste.

2. This is also borne out by the observation that intermarriage and even fantasies about intermarriage and interdining are major factors in triggering off caste riots in Tamil Nadu today. There is a need to work out a feminist position on this issue by Dalit women themselves since otherwise the debate deviates into the rape fantasies of men.

3. The observation of Kalpana Kannabiran that caste in itself is not egalitarian but practices discrimination of age and sex is valid among all castes today, including Dalits. At the same time, caste as a functioning solidarity network in the form of extended kinship also needs to be understood since it is one of the reasons for the tenacity of caste.

4. The Aryan invention theory has penetrated into feminist and Dalit analysis alike. While it is partly valid in analysing early forms of *varna* and of subjugation of women, it becomes misleading where it links up with colonial racial theories which are then projected as a monocausal explanation for the origin of caste and patriarchy.

5. Such monocausal explanations are weakening our perceptions. In the discourse of the women's movement they have led to a preoccupation with Brahminic sexual controls over women and an idealisation of low caste and tribal sexual freedom, while the collective rape of Dalit and Adivasi women, though a well-known phenomenon, remains very difficult to tackle. In the Dalit movements, racial theory has led to an externalization of the enemy so



that patriarchy and casteism among Dalits cannot sufficiently be tackled. Facing patriarchy and casteism within is an essential exercise for both the women's movement and the Dalits in order to overcome these phenomena.

6. The explanations of Morton Klass and Dr. Ambedkar are essential for understanding the deep-rootedness of the caste system, especially in the South, since a theory of invasion is totally inadequate here. At the same time, neither Morton Klass nor Dr. Ambedkar go into an analysis of how the closing into endogamous marriage circles is related to patriarchal controls over women. The specific functioning of patriarchy in different caste contexts needs to be understood.

7. Taking up this analysis, transition from matrilineal to patrilineal systems is an important aspect. However, even matrilineal systems have forms of patriarchal authority which is vested in maternal uncles and male cousins. It is important to see how the system operates. Some of the backward castes who today are involved in gang rape of Dalit women, practice uncle and maternal cousin marriage which originates from matrilineal customs. They have also taken to female infanticide among their own families. Thus, abstract notions about patriliney and matriliney may not be too helpful here.

8. Ambedkar's distinction between purity and pollution and the phenomenon of untouchability remains important. In the South, the origin of untouchability can clearly be traced to the anti-Buddhist and anti-Jain counter reformations. The impact of this situation on the development of patriarchy needs to be studied. Apart from this we in the women's movement need to acknowledge that the anti-Brahmin movements, though shaking Brahminism and strengthening the backward castes, have not tackled untouchability. In general, anti-Brahminism does not deliver the goods. We need to spell out what is our contribution to the struggles of Dalit women.

9. The logic of solidarity has to be one of down-casting and down-classing, not of social uplift. In fact, the whole hierarchy of the caste system has to be broken down by coming down to earth as far as our development concepts and perception of environmental questions go. The Gandhian option of denouncing untouchability but leaving the caste division of labour concept intact has been rejected by Ambedkar and the Dalit movement. The Hindu chauvinist approach which glosses over caste in the name

of a Hindu nation is another device to make social reality invisible. Traditionally, Dalits have had to do with safeguarding village boundaries, regulating the irrigation in the village and agricultural labour. It will be important to understand more about their culture and their contribution to village ecology, in order to get away from a perception of victimisation only and to work toward identification of their contribution to the production of life.

10. A commitment to the Dalit cause also involves organisational questions. The participation of Dalit women in their organisations needs to be strengthened. Whether these should be women's fronts or women's platforms is an open debate. However, this may be decided in concrete situations. The cause of Dalit women can only be strengthened if we in the autonomous women's movement also make an effort to reach out to Dalit movements. This, in turn, also requires drastic rethinking in the Dalit movement on patriarchy and on the women's movement. The principle of autonomy, which has protected women's issues from being hijacked by political parties, also holds a lesson for Dalit movements who have leaned heavily on political patronage, and this has often aggravated situations of caste conflicts. At the same time, the Dalit movement keeps reminding us that caste cannot be wished away but needs to be faced squarely.



## 6 Women, Ecology and Culture

In grappling with the crisis of ecology and of culture, we face two questions of great depth and magnitude: one, the problem of survival and identity; secondly, the problem posed by the limits of physical and spiritual endurance. The ecological crisis forces itself on our attention in the daily reports of droughts and floods, starvation deaths, poisoning through pesticides and chemical industries, soil salinity, water logging etc. The cultural crisis surfaces daily in communal and caste clashes, in the struggles of Dalits and Adivasis, and in the whole debate about secularism and freedom of religion.

It is no exaggeration to say that both the ecological and the cultural crises have affected women more deeply than men. It has been pointed out again and again that women are the worst victims of ecological deterioration since their working day has been drastically lengthened by scarcity of water, fuel and fodder, and their traditional skills and occupations have been adversely affected by new technologies in agriculture, artisanal work and marketing, while new opportunities have not sufficiently developed.<sup>1</sup> It has also been documented that women are adversely affected in situations of communal riots and that the whole communal battle about personal laws, freedom of religion etc., is largely fought out on the backs and at the cost of women.<sup>2</sup>

However, there are *two new moves* which have to be taken into account in the debate: From the side of the women's movements, we are raising today the question *how to go beyond victimisation, how to draw on the vital experiences and skills of women to reverse the situation.*<sup>3</sup> The overriding question is how to create a mode of production which does not depend on the exploitation of nature and labour power but which, in harmony with nature, provides for the survival needs of all. We must also ask how we can create a counter-culture which arrests both the trends towards uniformity and towards fragmentation, and the growing communalisation of

daily life. Women have practical skills and mental resources which need to be discovered and mobilised for this vast task. The second step, which logically follows from the first one of mobilising women's material and spiritual skills, is *to work out the connection between the ecological and the cultural crises* caused by a development model which is neo-colonial, capitalist, patriarchal and violently assaulting the base for human material and spiritual survival, and which is destructive of both nature and culture. This connection has not been made sufficiently because the feminist analysis has been focusing more on reorganisation of material culture.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the cultural debate on decolonisation, religion and secularism has been ambiguous as far as the women's question is concerned.<sup>5</sup> Ashish Nandy, who has raised many relevant questions on the model of science and technology underlying the prevailing development concept, has run into trouble by taking a cultural stand which could be co-opted by violently anti-feminist defenders of *sati*,<sup>6</sup> a company not of his choice but nevertheless raising questions of accountability.

My contention is that tackling the ecological crisis and the crisis of culture is a survival issue, not only because environmental destruction is close to reaching a level where it is irreversible but also because the cultural crisis can lead either to fascism or to fragmentation and disintegration, both of which would be destructive of any liberation movement. It is also crucial to tackle both these crises *together* because they are connected in their root-causes. My contention is also that a feminist perspective can give important impulses for a deeper analysis of class, caste and environmental destruction and for reconciliation with nature.

### *Ecological Crises, Capitalism, Patriarchy and Colonialism*

In the recent debate, a clear connection has been established between ecological crisis, capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism. This is not to deny that ecological crisis also exists with equal gravity in socialist countries but it is based on the insight that the predominant concept of industrialism, and of science and technology, originated in the overdeveloped capitalist Western countries and has largely been imitated in Eastern Europe. Even in the People's Republic of China, where appropriate technology was more developed, technological and scientific options were taken under the pressure of military conflict with the USSR and alliance with USA. The events cannot be understood without the history of



fascism and Stalinism, of hot and cold war. I am not saying this by way of apology for socialism but to draw attention to an important factor in the analysis of material reality.

Actually, the two books of Maria Mies and of Vandana Shiva, on which I am going to draw, do not really go into this overall context. Maria Mies in *Capitalism and Accumulation on a World Scale* goes into a global analysis which is preoccupied with the overriding question of how it is that feminism and women's movements have, to a large extent, been co-opted by capitalist governments, and development policies, being not only classist but also inherently patriarchal, cannot deliver the goods. She also analyses the origins of the sexual division of labour and the role of violence, and connects these aspects with colonial division of labour, and the role of colonial and sexual violence. She ends with a perspective of a feminist, ecologically viable society which will also be classless, decentralised, anti-consumerist, largely self-sufficient and based on a different science and technology.

Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive* gives us a history of the Chipko movement within the context of a very thorough study of the connections between forestry, agriculture and water management. She shows, through an evaluation of a large number of studies in the different fields, how a technocratic approach to development, which she flatly calls maldevelopment, has fragmented and separated these spheres and has been destructive of nature, of women's skills and expertise; of the survival base of the poor and of sustenance of life as a criterion for production. She emphasises strongly the colonial and patriarchal character of this imported development concept and projects a feminist indigenous culture which she expresses in terms like "feminine principle", *shakti* and *prakriti*, and characterises by features like holism, decentralisation, plurality and inter-dependence. She also raises the question of the relocation of the sacred, and emphatically demands that the sacredness of life has to replace the sacredness of science and technology, and of developmentalism. She sees the pseudo-worship of modernity and "progress" as more harmful than the traditional worship of nature and life-sustaining forces.

Though both Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva do not go into this connection, it is important to keep in mind that communalism as a political phenomenon is both a result of colonialism<sup>7</sup> and a backlash against it, and goes together with the development of capitalism and parliamentary democracy. It has often been pointed

out in the discussion on communalism and secularism that both the claims to universalism and nationhood are actually alien to Hinduism and a foreign import. They are often taken to connote a certain "Semiticization" of Hinduism. I have heard this term "Semiticization", which I consider a misnomer, from people as different as Romila Thapar, M.M. Thomas and Ashish Nandy. I consider it a misnomer because such a term plays on existing anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim sentiment, and characterises these religions as predominantly conquering and militant. Though both religions have an ideology of Holy War in their scriptures, Judaism has not had a corresponding history until Zionism turned communal under the impact of the fascist liquidation of Jews and British divide-and-rule policies, while Islam has had long and fruitful periods of non-militarised peaceful co-existence with other religions in many parts of the world, including the south of our own country. What has indeed happened today is that the Hindu religion, which had its own dialectics of plurality and universalism in the fragmentation of sects and castes, alongside of religious tolerance as long as these fragmentations remained accepted, has turned communal, in a situation of neo-colonial impact which was trying to overcome caste by *sanskritisation* and class conflict by appeal to religious nationalism. This leaves capitalism and existing development concepts intact while it obscures the reality of the increasing neo-colonial dependence by offering a pseudo-religious identity surrogate.

The extent to which communalism is patriarchal can be seen in the blatant anti-women statements<sup>8</sup> of communalist organisations, in the communal battle against a gender-just secular family law, and in the recent attempts to use women in the forefront of communal struggle even though such struggles are a direct attack on women's anti-communalist unity in the women's movement.<sup>9</sup>

### *Science and Technology as a Patriarchal Colonial Project*

In order to understand Maria Mies' and Vandana Shiva's contribution better, it is crucial to go into their critique of modern science and technology as a patriarchal colonial project. This is an important contribution to the debate on the question whether modern Western science and technology is "universal" and "neutral", implying that the only crucial question is who controls and uses it. The latter position has been taken by Marxist parties in power or close to power, including our own parliamentary Marxist parties



and by people's science organisations close to them like Shastra Sahitya Parishad. That science and technology as ideology can be highly authoritarian and oppressive in great contrast to its claims of enlightenment, was pointed out in detail by members of the Frankfurt School.<sup>10</sup> Of course, the protest against industrialism itself was alive among machine-storming Luddites, Utopian Socialists,<sup>11</sup> critics and reformers like William Morris<sup>12</sup> and, very importantly, in the anti-colonial struggle of the Gandhian Movement. It was the Nehruite ideology of scientific temper which destroyed this heritage after independence. A critical Indian Marxist voice on science and technology is today rediscovered in D.D. Kosambi<sup>13</sup> who, despite more orthodox approaches in various other fields, pleaded powerfully for developing solar energy instead of nuclear energy. The authoritarian and fragmenting colonial character of Western science and technology, and its inherent violence, has also been worked out at length over many years by Ashish Nandy.<sup>14</sup> That Asian scientific and technological discoveries have been in greater harmony and interdependence with nature and, thus, are more conducive to a holistic ecological approach, has been convincingly established by Claude Alvares by contrasting them with colonial concepts.<sup>15</sup>

What is new in the approach of Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva is the strong emphasis on the *putriarchal* character of Western science and technology which was much less evident in the earlier studies. They show how substitution of an organic perception of life by mechanistic, technocratic paradigms has contributed to exploitation of nature and displacement of women. They also establish more clearly the connection between ecological destruction and the capitalist "growth" concept as a patriarchal project. This contribution is crucial since it gives a final blow to the myth of neutrality, objectivity and universality of scientific categories, and methods of experimentation. However, there is a certain drawback in their conceptualisation as well.

Since both Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva draw heavily on Western feminist research on the Renaissance and the industrial revolution,<sup>16</sup> and since they are preoccupied with pinpointing colonial connections—which is in itself an extremely important contribution!—they end up virtually suggesting that patriarchy, as a full-fledged mechanism of exploitation, is a product of the Renaissance and scientific revolution. This is particularly true of Vandana Shiva's line of argument.

While the connection between witch-hunting and the development of modern science is extremely important,<sup>17</sup> it should *not* obscure the much earlier roots of patriarchy in antiquity<sup>18</sup> and, in our own civilisation, in Vedic and pre-Vedic culture. Also, it is important to emphasise with Maria Mies that earlier forms of patriarchy are not just a cultural category resulting from religious ideology but that they had a material base in the organisation of production of life from very early times. The way Vandana Shiva has taken Mies' analysis and reduced the problem to the Renaissance and to scientific imperialism is not enlightening for the understanding of the development of class, caste and patriarchy in the Indian context. Both Mies and Shiva are in danger of contributing to an ideology of patriarchy reductionism which resembles the class reductionism of the traditional left in reverse. They also have a tendency to externalise patriarchy as a primarily Western and modern category, which leaves out the age-old connection between patriarchy and caste in Indian society. Despite such words of caution, I feel that both Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva have given a very crucial impetus to the debate on science and technology and on ecology, not only by showing the destructive effects of a fragmented reductionist approach but also by drawing on the traditional skills of women. This is very inspiring in Vandana's narration of the Chipko Movement, in which the skills of integrating forestry, agriculture and water management are combined with a philosophy of nature and of knowledge which poses an alternative to modern specialisation and the promise of technocratic mechanistic solutions.

Vandana Shiva also makes an implicit contribution to the debate on women and religion by describing the ferment of local religious culture in the Chipko Movement which enhance women's dignity and allows them to express their creative relationship with nature. At the same time she singles out the *shukti* aspects of religion, but does not mention any of the religious controls over women. Neither does she go into the problem that, what she describes as the religious "feminine principle", is largely expressed in Hindu terms which coincide with *Sankhya* philosophy. This leaves open the question as to what the feminine principle may imply for Dalits, tribals, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians etc. One would also need to include in the debate communal attempts to appropriate ecological and women's issues and how to counter them. Also: When do religious interpretations of such issues turn communal? Heated



debates on these issues arose during the Save the Western Ghats March (SWGM), between the contingents from Kerala and from Karnataka, once the march had entered South Kanara where RSS forces are very active in the environmental movement.<sup>19</sup>

Another point which strikes one is the fact that there was a historical alliance between chauvinistic patriarchal religion and patriarchal science and technology during the witch-hunts of the post-Renaissance period. The witch-hunters could be catholics or protestants or enlightened scientists, but their ideologies were complementary to one another in controlling women, depriving them of skills and even killing them.

We can observe a contemporary version of such an anti-women alliance in the current debates on *sati* and on amnio-centesis. If the Shankaracharya of Puri advocates *sati* and asks: "If bodies are not equal how can rights be equal?"<sup>20</sup>, then he is fundamentally in the same beat as modern enlightened scientists who offer sex-determination and sex pre-selection as a technological "pro-women" solution to social discrimination, cheerfully contributing to further decimation of an already "scarcer half".<sup>21</sup> The patriarchal character of the state can be seen in the fact that both the central legislation on *sati* and the Maharashtra Act against sex-determination punish the women victims together with those who subject them to the crime. This connection between religious fanaticism and "modernity" does not manifest itself only in women's issues in the narrow sense but also operates in counterpoising RSS virility vs. Gandhiji's "femininity", and Brahmin values versus Shudra values in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, as Ashish Nandy has repeatedly pointed out.<sup>22</sup>

### *Reconceptualising Productivity—The Production of Life vs. the Production of Profit*

Apart from deepening the feminist dimension of the debate on science and technology, both Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva have contributed in an important way to the debate on productivity, redefinition of labour, and reassessment of subsistence production. This debate had earlier focused on emphasising "production of life" vs. the concept of "reproduction"<sup>23</sup>, and it also finds expression in the debate on the "invisibility" of women's work since it often cannot be measured in cash terms. Maria Mies traces the capitalist concept of productivity of the predatory ideology of "man the hunter" and points out that this type of productivity,

which is based on violence, is actually only a form of appropriation of nature and of other people's labour, while the subsistence labour of women, slaves and subjugated people is often not acknowledged as "productive" at all. However, she maintains that capitalist productivity cannot be sustained without the subsistence labour of women, and of contract labour and peasants in the colonies.

One can state the insight in even much simpler terms: without production of life, production of commodities is impossible; people have to *live* in order to produce and consume. Therefore, the criterion for production and consumption needs to be the production and sustenance of life. Use value of products has to override *exchange* value. Obviously, our economy is not organised according to such criteria. Substantial parts of our resources go into the production of means of destruction, and other substantial parts into the production of consumer-goods which are superfluous to the substances of life, wasteful of energy and natural resources and, thus, harmful to the environment.

All over the world, women have been the mainstay of subsistence economy and of production of life, and Maria Mies shows how the destruction of subsistence economy in Europe goes together with the creation of the 'housewife' concept. While, in the West, middle class women are turned into consumers, housewifization in the Third World takes the form of capitalist exploitation of household-based production in the informal sector. Even in socialist societies, the "housewife" concept, and thus sexual division of labour, has not fully been overcome despite large proportions of women participating in the extended production process. Maria Mies, focusing on Western societies, sees it as strategic to fight housewifization and consumerism, and proceeds from there to plead for a society of much more labour intensive, need based, decentralised and largely autarkic units of production in which sexual division of labour, class and the polarisation between head and hand could be overcome. However, it is not entirely clear how she envisages the overthrow of the dominant development and growth concept.

Vandana Shiva, in her analysis of the Chipko Movement and in her evaluation of forest, agricultural and water policies, goes further in the reconstruction of a vision of what production of life, in the sense of an ecologically viable subsistence production, means materially as well as spiritually. The situation is movingly depicted in a scene of confrontation between Chipko women and forest



officials, in which the women have brought along a lantern in bright day-light. Asked about its purpose, they explain that they have to make the forest officials see the light. The male experts need to be taught forestry. The forest officials, of course, scold the "ignorant" women who do not understand that the forest is a source of profit, resin and timber, but the women obstinately chant in return:

"What does the forest bear?

Soil, water and pure air.

Soil, water and pure air

Sustain the earth and all it bears."<sup>24</sup>

In order to understand more fully how production of life has been ousted by production of profit I think it is important to understand a bit more deeply the interaction of class and patriarchy. Since patriarchy by definition operates to upgrade men and downgrade women, it creates a class within a class and, thus, has a certain impact on the question of class and class alliances. The argument that women's struggles divide the working class has to be countered by the argument that it is patriarchy which divides women and men of the working class, while struggles against patriarchy *unite* the working class. Patriarchal working class men tend to make certain class alliances with the exploiter as can historically be seen in the struggles over "family wage" which account for unequal wages and assume women to be "housewives". While women are often accused of spreading "middle class values" when fighting patriarchy, the line of alliance for women is, on the contrary, one of *de-classing* while the line of alliance for *men* if they uphold patriarchy, is one of alliance with the *upper class*. In the Chipko situation, it is the men who opt to be contractors and thus side with the profit motive, while it is the women who protect subsistence production and ecology by upholding the rights of women and nature, and the right to life for all.

The State uses this interaction between class and patriarchy by trying to co-opt both women and ecology struggles into the existing development concept. Women are promised upward mobility, and ecological crisis is tackled by technocratic means. One of the problems is indeed that, since working class men have a vital interest in women's subsistence labour, they have accepted the predatory concept of labour and productivity. The assumption that

it is only wage labour which creates values, neglects the invisible subsistence production of women and the labour of nature as well. It also ignores the fact that the labour of nature can only be sustained if human labour is organised in harmony with nature. Interestingly, it was Marx who, in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, vehemently protested against the statement: "Labour is the source of all wealth and all culture." He said: "Labour is *not* the source of all wealth. Nature is as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such, that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature—human labour power."<sup>25</sup> He saw it as a bourgeois deception to ascribe "supernatural creative power" to labour. The industrial concept of dominating and controlling nature, to which much of the working class movement has also subscribed, comes to an end and it will be an end with terrible convulsions of ecological disaster and lethal fights over dwindling resources. It is therefore crucial that the working class struggle incorporates the survival issues of women and nature, and that ecological and women's struggle resist the upward mobility syndrome and orient themselves towards the poorest and most exploited sections like Adivasis, Dalits and the workers of the unorganised sector, of which women anyway form the majority.

The assertion of middle class and upper class patriarchal values and concepts in the field of production connects with a corresponding development in the field of religion and communalism. Communalist ideology and organisation has started as a patriarchal, urban middle class, more precisely petty bourgeois, phenomenon but it spreads out into the country-side and attempts to co-opt even dalits and adivasis, and it now tries to co-opt women. It also becomes more and more an explicit ideology of the ruling classes. Apart from offering identity in a situation of uprootedness, it projects perspectives of upward mobility. This upward mobility of course is largely a deception since the existing development concept by its very nature secures privileges only to an elite, while the survival needs of the masses and long-term survival needs to nature are not met.

What makes the situation more complicated is that today communalism not only manipulates working classes and women but it does this by superceding and reasserting caste at the same time. The attraction for low-caste, low-class people is the fact that caste is played down while, at the same time, upper caste values are



asserted. Further, these middle class/upper caste values serve to co-opt and domesticate women. This is important when it comes to spiritual values like those projected by Vandana Shiva. As long as the religious connotation of *prakriti*, *shakti* etc., is safely in the hands of the Chipko women, they may indeed express a feminist ecological perspective and the concept of sacredness of life. Picked up by the cross currents of caste and middle class ideology, such concepts are open to communal manipulation and can even be used to manipulate women and ecological issues from a middle class perspective. Patriarchal manipulation of women's-power concepts is, anyway, a sad chapter in the history of religions. The assertion of goddess religion and *shakti* aspects is full of ambiguities which need to be probed much more deeply. In the Western situation, the "return of the Goddess"<sup>26</sup> remains a middle class and fairly academic affair, "safe" in the sense that goddess religion has ceased to have a material base in subsistence agriculture and in actual organised worship (temples) for centuries. No petty bourgeois communal manipulation is on the agenda. From a psychological point of view, this trend may be quite healing.

Here, in India, things are much more complex. It is good and well to point out that there is a class component in the difference between the Devi as an independent female power-principle and the spouse Goddess, the more domesticated, patriarchal version of the goddess, as Lynn Gatewood does.<sup>27</sup> What she analyses is indeed something like the process of housewifization in the religious field, which certainly needs to be resisted. To go into these differences is important. However, we also know that there is a middle class, communalised version of undomesticated, "unspousified" *devi*, projected by some of the terrorists in the freedom struggle and, today, resurrected by communal organisations. There is definitely a world of a difference between "The Coming of the Devi" as an integral part of an Adivasi uprising during the freedom struggle in Gujarat which David Hardiman has so perceptively and movingly recorded in his subaltern studies<sup>28</sup> and the goddess-worship projected by martial communal organisations. The communalist manipulation of the feminine principle is an area which needs more exploration.

Superfluous to say, goddess worship and projection of a certain middle class type of feminine principle has even turned lethal to women in the practice of and debate on *sati*. Middle class values, loss in caste status, economic insecurity—all these are cross cur-

rents manipulating women, even co-opting them and enforcing both patriarchy and class together.<sup>29</sup> *Sati* is the supreme logic of housewifization mobilised against the *shakti* of women as independent producers organised in Chipko, production of profit *versus* production of life.

### *The Energy Question*

From *shakti* as feminine principle, we have to come back to energy as a productive force in the material sense because both are deeply connected. Besides, the kind of economic system which puts production of life at the centre and which overcomes sexual division of labour, class, and dichotomies between head and hand as projected by both Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, will need to undo and reconstruct existing socio-economic and political structures to an unprecedented extent. The strength of Vandana Shiva's argument is derived from the fact that she shows that the survival of nature, women and the poor is acutely threatened by the existing policies and that ecological intervention is an *immediate* question of survival. She does not deal with the energy question in a long-term perspective because she considers it virtually a "Western problem".

However, the question of energy use and energy resource arises in the daily struggles for survival of the marginalised masses in the traditional sector as well. I was alerted to this by a paper by John Kurien<sup>30</sup> which uses the example of the traditional fishermen to illustrate that ecological balance is a question of the *kind* of technology used and not only of who has access to or control over the technology. He argues that overfishing, and thus depletion of the sea, has been caused not only by trawling but, more so, even by outboard motorisation of small fishing boats. This means, technology needs to respect the time perspective of nature's growth processes, that there is a limit to "harvesting" of the sea by more sophisticated technological means within which alone it can yield any results. He pleads for a return to a more labour-intensive technology closer to nature, depending on the traditional knowledge and skills of the fishermen. He argues, among other things, with the law of entropy. Since he describes processes which are extremely similar to those which Vandana Shiva describes for agriculture, I felt compelled to read up on entropy, and felt that this perspective in fact needs to be essentially integrated into the ecological perspective since it strengthens very much the perspective which Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies are trying to develop. It



is the perspective of entropy which gives a final blow to the myth of unlimited growth.

I will draw, in the following, on the popularising presentation of the problem by Jeremy Rifkin, though of course a much more complicated and wider discussion on the subject has been going on.<sup>31</sup> There are two important aspects in Rifkin's book which have a fundamental bearing on our discussion. First, he deals with the first and second law of thermodynamics in order to show that an unlimited growth concept is simply an ideological attempt to negate some basic insights of physics. Second, he shows that history, the organisation of society and changes in mode of production, and science and technology, have been marked by what he calls "energy watersheds". The last energy watershed before capitalism coincided with the Renaissance and the beginning of the industrial revolution, and the present ecological crisis is seen as the expression of another energy watershed—the transition from fossil energy to the solar age.

The first law of thermodynamics simply states that the energy content of the universe is constant. Energy can neither be created nor destroyed, it can only be transformed from one form into another. If this were all, there would be no problem. However, the snag is with the second law of thermodynamics which says that entropy is ever on the increase. This means, with every transformation of energy a certain amount of energy changes from an available or free state (i.e. available for work) into a non-available or bound state (i.e. some kind of disorder). Rifkin connects entropy directly to the ecological crisis: "That unavailable energy is what pollution is all about. Many people think that pollution is a by-product of production. In fact, pollution is the sum total of all the available energy in the world that has been transformed into unavailable energy. Waste, then, is dissipated energy. Since according to the first law, energy can neither be created nor destroyed but only transformed one way—towards a dissipated state—pollution is just another name for entropy; that is, it represents a measure of the unavailable energy present in a system."<sup>32</sup>

This, in itself, shows the absurdity of a developmental approach which sees low per capita energy production (and consumption) as a sign of backwardness. Of late, great effort is invested in the promotion of more nuclear plants in order to combat this kind of backwardness.<sup>33</sup> However, from the perspective of entropy, energy conservation and low energy use are a sign of hope. Rifkin goes in

great detail into the devastating effects of high energy use in overdeveloped industrial society. However, even in our own society, certain types of high energy use lead to environmental destruction. This is not only a question of cement factories and chemical industries but also of much less centralised technologies like the outboard motors of fishermen or the techniques of the green revolution. With a certain type of energy use, renewable resources like fish, forest, water, soil, become non-renewable.

This has to do fundamentally with the energy watershed at the end of the middle ages when the economy switched from wood to coal, from renewable resource to non-renewable fossil fuel and massive use of non-renewable mineral resources.

What Rifkin describes as an energy watershed coincides with the industrial revolution, rise of capitalism, development of patriarchal science and technology, replacement of an organic world view by a mechanistic one and patriarchal destruction of women's traditional skills. While Rifkin does not go into the analysis of class and patriarchy and of colonialism, he deals with most of the aspects which Vandana Shiva has worked out: specialisation and reductionism, the diminishing returns of technology, the self-defeating logic of input-intensive agriculture and reformulation of knowledge and science. Since he lacks political analysis, he sees transformation towards the solar age more in terms of individual conversion in lifestyle and collective experiments in natural agriculture. He also pins his hopes on Third World countries which may not subscribe to the Western development model. Besides, he sees redistribution of existing wealth as an essential prerequisite for an ecologically viable society, but does not really indicate how he hopes to achieve that. Despite such shortcomings, Rifkin's vision of the ecological society in the solar age comes in fact very close to what Maria Mies envisages in her final chapter, and her argument would have been greatly strengthened by the inclusion of the perspective of entropy.

One of the crucial junctures on the road towards an ecologically viable society will be the battle against the multinational corporations which have already monopolised seeds and technologies, and will try to forge ahead in capturing the market for bio-technology and bio-mass based energy resources. This has been seen very clearly by both Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, but the future forms of struggle need much more exploration. Maria Mies makes a strong plea for consumer resistance and the politicization of



consumption, appealing to women to refuse their expected consumer roles. A much wider question for women is how to recapture production and to assert the production of life concept as the central concept for the reorganisation of the production process.

While trying to do this it will also be essential to extend the debate on population and decision making on birth. The present resistance against population control techniques which are violently anti-women, and the struggle against targeting, has to be complemented by ecological struggles which will safeguard children's survival (for example, availability of drinking water) and a critique of the existing pattern of family which makes marriage and child-bearing virtually compulsory. To have and not to have children needs to be a matter of socially responsible choices in interaction with nature. Social support structures which form an alternative to the patriarchal family need to be developed.

### *The Caste Factor*

While grappling with the question how production of life could have been ousted by production of profit and how the law of entropy could have completely been obscured by a blind faith in an unlimited potential for growth, how the feminine principle is being appropriated and manipulated by patriarchal ideology, caste is an important mediating factor to be analysed. Caste is another cross current in the interaction between patriarchy and class. Caste has had an impact on division of labour which is otherwise determined by class and patriarchy; it has mediated the control over resources and it has vastly encouraged the polarisation between labour of head and labour of hand. I have earlier argued that sexual division of labour and sexual violence are among the root causes of ecological destruction<sup>34</sup> and I uphold this argument. I think this aspect is neglected by Vandana Shiva who, in her enthusiasm for the feminine principle, sees women's monopoly over subsistence agriculture as a sign of strength only and not also as a sign of patriarchal extraction of subsistence labour. I am now trying to connect this earlier position of mine with caste as a mediating factor.

Unfortunately, most studies on caste do not apply themselves to the question of patriarchy: they simply take it for granted as a given, similar to the rising and setting of the sun. Also, the older studies do not normally take ecological aspects into consideration. It, therefore, requires some effort to connect existing caste studies with the focal concerns of this paper: women, ecology and culture.

However, as far as the ecological dimension is concerned, the work of Morton Klass is of some help.<sup>35</sup> It is obviously impossible here to go into definitions of caste, the relationships between *varna* and *jati*, or the debate on the origins of the caste system. For our present purpose it may be useful to follow Morton Klass who shows that the one operational unit which maintains the caste system more than all other aspects (like, for example, occupational criteria, hierarchy, purity and pollution) is the functioning of caste as marriage circle.<sup>36</sup> This endogamous body has the power to control the behaviour of the membership. It reflects both territoriality and kinship, and has its own leadership and internal control, submitting to no higher authority. It has the power to expel as well.

Caste as marriage circle has heavily depended on patriarchy, and even in case of intermarriage, caste has been maintained by subsuming women under their husbands' caste. This principle has most clearly been expressed by the principle of hypergamy which is, in itself, an anti-feminist principle since it co-opts women into patriarchal upward mobility and undercuts feminist solidarity of declassing. Since production of life has been controlled by this marriage circle, there has been an in-built mechanism in caste to alienate women from their original skills and to "uplift" them through ritual upgrading and its ensuing restrictions. Even among Dalits, caste as marriage circle has been in operation and basically it is only among Adivasis that production of life has been organised in a different way. This is not to say that patriarchy is absent among Adivasis but among them it takes different forms, which cannot be explored here.

Since production of life is fundamental to all production, it is also obvious from what has been said above that caste is not just an ideological phenomenon of the super-structure but has a material base to the extent that it continues to function as marriage circle. Of course, there are other material aspects as well to caste, and that is the aspect of appropriation of resources for survival, be these in the form of material or economic resources or in the form of political leverage. These wider aspects often go beyond the marriage circle and extend to *jati* or groups of *jatis*. Besides, under present conditions, even caste as marriage circle, especially if it follows hypergamous rules, also serves ongoing original accumulation of capital with dowry as a form of plunder, as Maria Mies has pointed out.<sup>37</sup>

In his chapter "The Economy of Caste", Morton Klass develops



an argument which enables us to come closer to identifying the functioning of caste in an ecological perspective. Here it is not possible to go into the intricacies of his argument which draws on Marvin Harris' study on the sacred cow (ecological anthropology) and Polanyi's characterisation of socio-economic interaction as reciprocity, redistribution and exchange, which Klass modifies into reciprocal exchange, redistributive exchange and market exchange. Klass also follows Leslie White who sees social systems as "energy-capturing systems" bound by the laws of thermodynamics and then applies all these insights to the analysis of caste with the help of Neale's application of Polanyi's categories to the study of a North Indian village, comparing it with a study of Kathleen Gough of a village in South India.

To simplify his complicated analysis, we can say that Klass, together with Neale, sees the caste system in traditional village India as "a redistributive exchange system in which the dominant caste in a village, under the authority of the government, controls the production of the crop, the distribution of it, and even the allocation of services".<sup>38</sup> Participation in this system is not by individuals but by castes in the sense of marriage circles. "Each of these marriage-circles articulates with the total economic system by providing, or controlling access to a specific set of commodities or services, with the dominant caste of the village serving as allocative caste for the redistributive exchange."<sup>39</sup> Klass emphasises that this system remained largely outside the market, regulated an agricultural production which integrated a vast cattle population and was ecologically wholesome. It depended on the supervision by the dominant castes which were themselves not involved in agricultural labour. Since he is interested only in the origins of caste, Klass does not go into the question, what has happened to the caste system under colonialism, and he does not trouble himself with the question, how agriculture could have degenerated from an ecologically eminently viable system to a disastrously destructive one.

If one tries to relate all this back to Vandana Shiva's analysis of traditional agricultural skills controlled mainly by women and maintaining an undisturbed ecological balance, one stumbles over questions which cannot be answered. From Vandana's book one comes away with an impression of a democratically organised collective agriculture dominated by the "feminine principle" while from Morton Klass, and the many field studies he quotes, one

identifies a hierarchical, patriarchal system which was, nevertheless, ecologically functional as long as it did not succumb to the onslaught of market forces.

I find it easier to explain how the model which Klass describes could be superseded by technocratic, patriarchal, Western development concepts than to understand it from Vandana Shiva's analysis which treats caste factors as non-existent. In the model which Klass describes, agriculture is carried out under patriarchal, high caste supervision: head-labour controls hand-labour. Such a system, under the onslaught of an energy watershed, *i.e.* substitution of renewable by non-renewable, can easily betray the feminine principle to which it was not committed in the first place. The compartmentalised Brahmin mind has a natural affinity to the reductionist Western mind, with the sole difference that it can resort to reintegration in the spiritual field. This is one of the reasons why the march into the twenty first century is put forward as going along with Indian spirituality.

There is another factor within the functioning of the caste system which has a bearing on women and ecology. As Louis Dumont has pointed out, purity and pollution in the traditional system was measured by the degree of interaction with organic life.<sup>40</sup> This is why involvement with agriculture and with child birth, including menstruation which is related to fertility, is most polluting. There is, thus, an in-built communality between Dalits, Shudras and women from this point of view. While death is also ritually polluting, the martial castes, who were professionally death-dealing, were not ritually polluted by their occupation. They were ranked above only those involved in production of life. This is ecologically significant because it connects with the pseudo-productivity of the predatory approach which Maria Mies describes *vs.* the production of life carried out by women, Dalits and Shudras. In an ecologically viable mode of production, interaction with organic life will be of the greatest importance, and this is an additional reason why the recapturing of the feminine principle will have to happen in alliance with the struggle of Adivasis, Dalits and Shudras. This also implies that Dalits and Adivasis have to fight patriarchy in their own quarters if they want to avoid either cooperation by upper caste communal forces or communalisation of their own demands.

Having said all this, I hasten to add that I do *not* suggest a position of unity between Adivasis, Dalits and all "minorities" which is "anti-Hindu". Such a position has been floated by various



groups as something particularly radical<sup>41</sup> but I consider it to be potentially communalist and bound to create a communal backlash. Even "anti-Brahmin" is a label which does not sufficiently express what the struggle is all about. All these are externalisations of the problem of caste and patriarchy which obscure the fact that the enemy is in our own midst. Casteism and patriarchy, as well as communalism operate in all of us and we have to tackle this from within. Even the women's movement, the Dalit movement or the ecological movement are not free from patriarchal, casteist and communalist attitudes.

The struggle is much more complicated. This can be seen from the debate on the sacredness of the cow. If cattle are as crucial to Indian agriculture and as ecologically useful as Marvin Morris, Morton Klass and Vandana Shiva assert with a lot of documentary evidence, then it has to be admitted that there is more to cow protection than meets the eye. One has then to distinguish cow protection and worship as a popular belief in an agricultural setting from cow worship as a middle class ideology which may turn communal or anti-women by promoting a docile mother-image of infinite patience. I whole-heartedly agree with David Hardiman when he says, "All religions consist, to a large extent, of assimilated folk beliefs. It is this which gives them their mass appeal and great pertinacity over time. Religions are highly ambiguous, with seemingly identical sets of doctrines being made to serve quite contradictory causes. It is an elite form of socialism which can view religion as merely an imposition from above."<sup>42</sup>

This means the debates on sacred cows, sacred forests, vegetarianism and many other issues have to go on in their own rights, while everyone involved tries to use ecological criteria and to fight patriarchy, caste and middle class values from within. There is no ready-made, unambiguous, ecological or feminist folk-tradition to fall back on. The process is dialectical and very painful.

### *Towards a Sustainable Feminist Classless Society*

To summarise, we can return to the initial questions. Firstly, what are the material and cultural skills of women which will be important for building a new society? Secondly, how can the ecological and cultural crises be overcome together.

As far as skills are concerned, it is indeed women's intimate knowledge of forestry, agriculture, water conservation, seeds, herbal medicine which needs to be mobilised against the monopoly

of government planning, educated elites, industrial vested interests and multinational corporations. Under the present onslaught of development policies in the countryside, and with the rapid spread of TV, such skills can easily be devalued and destroyed. To preserve them and to make them instrumental to a policy which focuses on production of life is an urgent task. How this can practically be done needs to be explored. Beyond this, women who are still able to transmit such skills need also to be drawn into the debate on multinationals and the coming onslaught of bio-technology and food-processing, which will be ecologically and culturally ruinous in many ways. Food processing will not only drive out traditional subsistence crops but will further de-skill women, impoverish local diets and destroy cultural identities, apart from creating new health hazards. Incidentally, many of the traditional skills of women which are ecologically important are very labour intensive. This is also why they have remained female skills. This aspect reinforces my earlier point that overcoming sexual division of labour will be crucial, not just in the sense of co-opting women into male occupations but for teaching traditional labour intensive skills to men also.

A study needs to be made of the different skills of women in the informal sector from the point of view of what they do to the environment and what they do to women as workers. Where such skills are ecologically useful, they need to be strengthened. Any form of mechanisation has to be evaluated under similar aspects. The question of consumer resistance which Maria Mies raises, is an important one in our situation as well, not only in a middle class context but even among the poorer sections where middle class consumer values are spread through media influence. A debate on synthetics and plastics is needed, and consumer resistance has to be built against ecologically damaging goods.

There are also cultural skills, in the more narrow sense of folk forms of song and dance, which need to be rethought in a movement content. In the Tamil Nadu situation, I can think of a simple skill like the *karagattam*, which is a Dalit folk-art carried out by women who dance with water pots on their heads. This is associated with *Shakti* and water and, thus, with profound production of life symbolism. Today, this dance has become a mere tourist attraction. It has been deprived of meaning, commercialised, and has become a vehicle of sexual objectification and exploitation of women. Do we just write off such skills or can they become part of a counter-culture?



In the light of what Vandana Shiva writes on the popular religion of the Chipko women, and of the ongoing cooperation of ecological issues and women's concerns, the debate on religion needs to be carried further along the lines developed in this paper. Despite being oppressive structures in many of their organised forms, religions have also given inner spaces to women and ecological spaces to larger communities. These aspects need to be rediscovered and weighed against potential communal manipulation. Active struggle against communalism needs to be an integral part of the women's movement, working class movement, ecological movement and Dalit and Adivasi movements. This struggle has to go beyond a narrow bourgeois concept of secularism which can see religion only as a "private affair".

Finally, there needs to be a more integrated debate on violence and non-violence since the perception of this question is different in class organisations, in the struggles of Dalits and Adivasis, in the women's movement and in an ecological perspective. However, this debate cannot be carried out in the abstract but needs to be developed in concrete struggles.

## 7 The Development Debate and Gender Implications

It was during the 1960s, the first international development decade, that the phenomenon of mass poverty, was conceptualised as "under-development". In the words of C.T. Kurien, "In the United Nations circles and in most parts of the world, countries with a per capita income of less than one-tenth of that of the United States were classified as under-developed countries. By this reckoning nearly 70 per cent of the population of the world lived in under-developed countries."<sup>1</sup> The stupendousness of the task to "develop" these countries did not deter the "developed" nations since they had faith in the unlimited possibilities of science and technology and of free enterprise.

It was assumed, whether in good faith or not, that by exporting Western development models, giving financial aid, transferring science and technology, there would be a "trickle down effect" and poverty would slowly vanish from the face of the earth. Many "development aid" programmes were devised in this spirit. In the Third World, there were different development models in currency. While the above mentioned one was certainly dominant, some countries with a better resource base and a more independent national bourgeoisie, tried to strive towards more self reliance, import substitution and the like. However, even for countries like India, international penetration increased dramatically over time. One striking example is the Green Revolution technology, seed controls etc., which created new dependencies precisely in the attempt to achieve self-reliance in food production. Such dependencies have been growing over the decades and have today, with the proclaimed march into the 21st century, achieved alarming proportions.

It was in the early seventies that the fallacies of the Western development concept became much more visible. In India, the very success of the Green Revolution brought this to light. The package deals, though considerably enhancing agricultural output, benefitted the better placed farmers more than the poorer ones.



Loss of land was frequent among the lower strata of the peasantry and the ranks of agricultural labour expanded. Food stocks grew not only due to higher output but also due to lack of buying power of the poor.

At the level of the so-called "developed" nations, the ecological crisis made itself felt by that time and the debate on limits to growth was carried out by the Club of Rome and similar organisations. At that time, many Third World countries took this debate as a device to withhold "progress" from the poor nations. The true depth of the crisis was not yet recognised.

This was also the time of a new wave in the women's movement in many of the Third World countries. While new women's movements had started in the West in the mid-sixties, in the Third World countries the new wave took off in the late sixties and became more visible by the mid-seventies. It was the result of pressure from the women's movement that the women's decade was declared from 1975 to '85. An assessment of the situation of women during 1975 brought to light alarming facts and figures of women's marginalisation in both developed and under-developed countries.

In the Third World it is sometimes thought that the women's movement in the West was a result of increasing "emancipation" of women due to "development". It is however important to understand that in the West, the period of reconstruction and expansion of capitalism had in fact led to the increasing disempowerment of women in these societies. The women's movement was a response to this marginalisation. However, since the sixties and early seventies were a phase of economic boom in these countries, demands took the form of a "larger share in the cake" and did not address themselves to the connections between capitalism, mass poverty and the marginalisation of women.

This made an impact on Third World nations where the marginalisation of women was in some ways less since subsistence economy in rural areas was largely dependent on women's labour and women's subsistence work is crucial to daily survival. At the same time, privatisation and destruction of the resource base took on even more alarming proportions in these countries, posing a direct threat to the survival of the poor masses and implicitly to vast sections of women.

Once again, the approach to women as a marginalised section was similar to that of the poor. There was hope of a "trickle down" and "getting a larger share of the cake". It took quite a few years

during the women's decade to realise that it was not a matter of a share in the cake but that the cake itself was a wrong concept. What was required was rice, *chapatis* and *ragi*, not cake. It was the very production of cake which destroyed the production of staple foods. It was the rush after the cake itself which enhanced poverty and the marginalisation of women.

Today it has become a widely acknowledged fact, supported by vast research and grass-roots experience, that despite substantial economic growth and certain shifts in the socio-economic structure, the overall situation of the poor has at best been stagnant and has been deteriorating among those closer to the bottom of the social ladder, especially Dalits, Adivasis, workers in the traditional and informal sectors and women.<sup>2</sup>

The further deterioration of women's situation as a worldwide phenomenon during the International Women's Decade has been diagnosed in the DAWN document which reviewed a vast body of field studies from all over the world. The document states:

While traditional gender based systems of subordination have been considerably transformed by the forces of economic growth, commercialisation, and marked expansion, subordination itself persists, although in some cases more impersonal forces in the labour market replace the direct control of women within patriarchal rural households. We must understand the impact of these processes on women's relative access to resources, income, and employment, as well as on sexual division of labour... The almost uniform conclusion of the Decade's research is that, with a few exceptions, women's relative access to economic resources, incomes and employment has worsened, their burdens of work have increased, and their relative and even absolute health, nutritional and educational status has declined.<sup>3</sup>

In India, the overall deterioration of women's survival chances and work participation during this century was documented in the Survey on the Status of Women in India of 1975 and the overall trend has been acknowledged in the recent National Perspective Plan for Women: 1988–2000 A.D.

"In proportional terms (women's) participation rate has declined dramatically from 33.7 percent in the 1911 Census to 20 percent in the 1961 census. Even following the new and broader



definition of work, the female participation rate has between 1971 and 1981 registered only a marginal improvement from 12.06 percent to 13.99 percent. The size of women's representation in the total labour force has also shrunk from 34.44 percent in 1911 to 31.53 percent in 1961, and 17.35 in 1971... Sectorwise composition of workers reveals an ever increasing process of marginalisation of women, with agriculture accounting for 80 percent of employment in 1971 as against 73.9 percent in 1911 and 79.6 percent in 1961. Women workers in industry declined from 14.7 percent (1911) to 10.5 percent (1971) and in the service sector from 11.4 percent to 9.4 percent between 1911 and 1971."<sup>4</sup>

From 1971–81 marginal improvements have been recorded in the ratio of female to male workers. Yet, massive displacement of women has taken place by 'modernisation' in coir, *beedi*, match, textiles, tobacco plantations, coal mines and other industries.<sup>5</sup> Despite marginal improvements of women's employment in the public sector and to a less extent in the private sector, over 90% of women workers remain in the so-called informal sector. Apart from alarming economic marginalisation, deterioration is noted also in terms of other threats to survival. Bina Agarwal, reviewing the materials of the Conference on Women and the Household in Asia held in Delhi in January 1985, points out: "Both violence in general and violence against women in particular are clearly on the rise all over Asia."<sup>6</sup> Alongside with this, there is a threat to survival by ecological destruction and new technologies like amniocentesis.

There are some overriding features in our development concept which interlink the perpetuation of poverty, the marginalisation of women, and the destruction of the environment. Briefly, they are as follows.

1. Growth without justice, i.e. growth of the upper crust and some marginal welfare measures for the rest.

2. Technocratic development, capital-intensive and labour saving, with the marginalisation of the poor in general, and of women in the informal sector in particular. The existence of subsistence production, particularly in the informal sector, is essential to sustain the growing high-technology sector.

3. Totalisation of the market, penetration and destruction of old subsistence economies controlled by small producers, tribals, and women, leading to scarcity of bio-mass, soil erosion, water scarcity,

collapse of the climate and the daily survival mechanisms of the poor, particularly of women.

4. Science and technology as ideology, the computerised march into the 21st century as the perfect mechanistic panacea for problems like poverty, women's drudgery and ecological disasters like draughts and floods. Promise to "manage" all these, preferably in very centralised ways.

Another aspect of deterioration is in the cultural field. Women's rights are threatened from two ends. On the one hand, religious revivalism, fundamentalism and communalism are encroaching on women's free spaces. On the other hand, so called new avenues of freedom opened up by capitalism go along with massive objectification and commercialisation of women's bodies and violent assaults on their physical and spiritual integrity. It is important to understand that both these tendencies are connected and rooted in a development model which perpetuates and deepens poverty and marginalises women.

While on the one hand there are substantial gains in the legal field due to consistent lobbying of women's organisations (eg. amendment of rape laws, expansion of inheritance laws etc.), even legal spaces are narrowing in some other ways as can be seen by the introduction of the Muslim Women's Protection Act, the new legislations on *sati* which punishes the victim if she survives, the weaknesses, in the legislation on sex-determination tests etc. In some of the other Asian countries, women's spaces have been narrowed down in alarming proportion under the pressure of fundamentalist lobbies. Besides, 'development' can often expand violence against women into spaces which were relatively free of it earlier. One of the most blatant examples is the appearance of rampant female infanticide in certain pockets in Tamil Nadu where this practice was unknown only fifteen years ago.<sup>7</sup> It has been shown that this problem is caused by a continuation of a tradition of violence among the Pramalai Kallars near Usilampatti and change in the agricultural pattern, having to do with a change over to irrigation, cotton crops, i.e. privatisation and market penetration, and change from land rights of women to exclusive control of land by men and the substitution of low marriage cost or bride price, by dowry. It is alarming to see that this happens in a setting where women have earlier been treated in a relatively more egalitarian way and where marriage takes place within the kinship group.



As a response to this overall deterioration, there have been certain modifications in the responses. Beyond "trickle down" approaches and attempts to integrate women into the mainstream of the economy, there has also been the attempt to focus on access to resources and basic survival needs with special emphasis on fuel, fodder and water. However, without land reform and change in mainstream policies, such emphasis has remained largely on paper.<sup>8</sup>

There have also been attempts to come to a more holistic development concept as far as women are concerned which means an attempt not only towards direct economic development but also improvement in access to education, health, child care, protection from violence, political participation and legal protection. However, as long as mainstream policies continue to marginalise women, gains in one field are always undone by losses in another. Besides, what the organising values of a counter-culture built by women's movements could be, still needs much wider debate.

It may be illustrative to briefly go into the question of what has happened to women where they have been integrated into economic growth strategies. Such integration can be seen both in industrial and rural production. Since the sixties, labour intensive, export-oriented industries (mostly based on multi-national investment) have been a major form of employment of women in the countries of South East Asia, especially in electronics, garments and toy making. Such employment, searching for young, unmarried women with "nimble fingers" has been shown as being very exploitative in terms of low pay, low job security and sexual exploitation.<sup>9</sup>

Some recent literature argues that today, after twenty years, improvement of women's work situation can be marked where high demand for labour was current and where the government took initiatives to improve the work situation, e.g. in Singapore—while in Korea, due to a continuous slack in the labour market and lack of state support, conditions have remained very hard.<sup>10</sup> However, wherever labour conditions really improve, like in Singapore and Hong Kong, investment may become less attractive for multi-nationals and industries may be reallocated in more profitable areas with a more manageable workforce.

In the rural field, a telling example is the success story of milk production in Kaira district of Gujarat.<sup>11</sup> The programme is significant since it was part of Operation Flood and was also devised

explicitly to empower women with the assistance of UNICEF and FAO. While the scheme has indeed enhanced milk production, it has also deviated the use of milk for urban supply of chilled milk, milk powder, cheese, baby foods and chocolates which serve the elite while the rural households are deprived of the traditional use of buttermilk. It has also led to a situation of excellent availability of veterinary services for cows which have much greater chances to be medically attended to when in labour than any woman in the area.

The project is entirely geared towards urban marketing. The approach is very professional and almost entirely controlled by technocratic males. Participation of women in the milk co-operatives is below 20 and often below 10 per cent. Acquisition of milk cattle has enhanced women's daily work burden by several hours—much more than men's—though it has also increased their earning capacity. However, women do not necessarily have the control over this enhanced household income. There have been no serious attempts at all to organise women for active planning in the process of production of distribution.

### *Patriarchy and Poverty: Wants Versus Needs*

C.T. Kurien has shown very lucidly that development and under-development are inadequate categories to come to terms with the real situation. He has shown "that mass poverty of the kind that we have is basically a societal problem, and that it is *not only an aberration of our economic system but one of its major characteristics*".<sup>12</sup> This means, poverty cannot be abolished by the capitalist system since it is actually produced and perpetuated by the very logic of its functioning. Similarly it has been pointed out that it is the very policies of the existing system which have marginalised women. In the words of the NPP Critique: "Recommendations to bring women 'into the mainstream of development' ignore the reality of women's marginalisation being the *result* of such 'mainstream' development, and the critique of such policies brought up by the women's movement."<sup>13</sup>

However, it is necessary to understand much more deeply how the perpetuation of poverty and the marginalisation of women actually function and to what extent they are directly connected and how they are also distinct. I feel it is due to a certain lack of conceptualisation in some of the critique of the women's movement that it is hard to get an overall understanding of the problem. This is why the DAWN and NPP critique arrive at quite different



conclusions. This is again why the NPP critique also arrives at demands which look at times contradictory in themselves.

In the following paras I would like to build a connection between two independent analyses of the functioning of capitalism—one focussing on poverty, the other on the marginalisation of women. Both these analyses, though using different terminology, converge in many of their observations and also partly in their conclusions. I am referring here to C.T. Kurien's analysis of the problem of poverty<sup>14</sup> and to Maria Mies' study on patriarchy and accumulation.<sup>15</sup> The greatest divergence and difficulty lies probably in finding solutions to the problem of changing the system. But these can only be groped for as the analysis proceeds and conclusions are attempted.

C.T. Kurien's study is an indictment of current technocratic concepts of growth in GNP and per capita income since this approach automatically assumes that prosperity will be achieved if the GNP is raised and population growth is curtailed.<sup>16</sup> He defines poverty as "the socio-economic phenomenon whereby the resources available to a society are used to satisfy the wants of the few while the many do not have even their basic needs met".<sup>17</sup> He also points out that national income is not a mere number but implies the problem of *value* of goods and services produced during a period of time. This valuation is a social process connected with power relationships based on patterns of ownership and organisation of production relations.<sup>18</sup> The emphasis on exchange value and profit which governs the very production process itself, erodes the focus on the use value of goods. In other words: it is possible to make profits with luxury goods while basic needs remain unmet.

This leads him to the distinction between the production for basic needs (N-circuit) and the production for wants (W-circuit). While it is not always easy to distinguish between the two, human needs are per definition limited while human wants are per definition unlimited. Thus W-circuit is hooked up with unlimited growth, N-circuit is not. Historically, largely aided by colonialism, the wants oriented economy has been superimposed on the need based economy and has eroded to a large extent this need-based economy. This is mediated by a cross circuit (C-circuit) between the two which consists of credit systems and marketing devices.

Three crucial factors operating in this process are the privatisa-

tion of all resources, concentration of ownership in the hands of a few, expanding market penetration and promotion of labour saving, capital intensive 'efficient' type of science and technology.<sup>19</sup> He raises the question on how these factors can be resisted and how a need based economy can be built up in a decentralised way and from below. This, as he emphasizes, is not possible within the existing system but he feels that changing the system is not impossible. He also makes it clear that to a large extent this is a question of value decisions and an *alternative ethos*.<sup>20</sup> The material base for such a new ethos is definitely there in the very survival needs of the poor and, as we would add, of women. C.T. Kurien points out that competitive aggression and an acquisitive spirit are not eternal norms of human behaviour. He sees a possibility to break up these fetters of the past which are rooted not in economic principles but in social decisions. He emphasizes that "one of the basic characteristics of a need-based economy is its openness which lets other social processes determine what the goals of an economic order should be".<sup>21</sup>

In practice, he advocates small, decentralized units of planning and production along the lines of the N-circuit and the need to delink this production from the W-circuit and to create trade channels and credit systems built by people from below but sponsored by the state. Such production would cater directly to basic local needs, using as much as possible local resources and involving democratic decision making in planning, organisation of production and circulation. He envisages this as follows: "A typical N-circuit may thus consist of few small collective farms operated by erstwhile landless labourers, some co-operative farming units formed by a few small farmers, a few weaving families, some artisans engaged in small manufacturing and repair services primarily catering to the needs of family units, the retail traders etc. The domain of the circuit may also include a section of the population engaged in constructing wells to provide drinking water, or in putting up houses using primarily local material. It can also have a few schools and a primary health centre."<sup>22</sup>

C.T. Kurien thus drastically raises questions of ownership of resources, of what is produced, how and for whom. However, since this book remains confined to the level of economic planning, he remains limited in envisaging who would bring about the changes in the system, i.e. the organisational process of social forces for transformation remains largely untouched.



On the other hand, Maria Mies deals with the same fundamental problems of society but from a feminist perspective. Since her pre-occupation is not poverty but patriarchy, her analytical framework is different. However, since she addresses herself to the problem of accumulation, she deals with the same critique of a system of unlimited growth and satisfaction of wants at the cost of basic human needs, though she uses a different terminology. She deals with the dichotomy of wants *versus* needs under the heading of origins of sexual division of labour and scrutinizes the concept of productivity. She analyses women's production as geared to production and sustenance of life (*i.e.* the equivalent of need based production) and connects this with the concept of subsistence production. She characterises men's productivity as extraction on the base of this need-oriented production of life and counterpoises these approaches in the models of food gathering and early agriculture *versus* man the hunter model. (This comes close to production for wants).

She also goes at length into a feminist critique of Western science and technology pointing out the patriarchal implications in the very methodology of Western Science. She then shows how application of this type of science and technology has contributed, together with privatisation of resources and international market penetration, to disempower and dispossess women, to deprive them of control over resources and to confine them to the subsistence sector by "housewifisation" and use of violence. Her final chapter "Towards a Feminist Perspective of a New Society" raises very similar questions as C.T. Kurien, namely how to restructure the economy towards need based production, and how to change the underlying values of consumerism. She also argues for decentralised production and alternative channels of exchange. She sees the women's movement as a major agent to bring about such changes but also has no clear idea on how this need based decentralised production will not be instrumentalised and subordinated by the existing profit oriented economy. This aspect needs further exploration.

While C.T. Kurien's analysis needs to be enhanced by the dimensions of ecological destruction and patriarchal marginalisation of women as well as an analysis of caste factors, Maria Mies' analysis, which has a strong ecological dimension, needs to fully absorb the problem of mass poverty. Yet they converge in some basic insights. Even before having access to the books of C.T. Kurien and Maria

Mies, I had raised the question of need based production *vs.* profit oriented production in connection with the problem of poverty, sexual division of labour, violence and ecological destruction. I had taken the view that production of life or need based subsistence production is the base of all other social production and that the very fact that this sphere had been taken for granted as being the private domain of women had contributed in a major way to ecological destruction. I had also made the point that an ecologically sustainable production process can only be need based and not profit-oriented. I later extended this analysis to include other traditional producers, workers in the unorganised sector, Dalits and Adivasis.<sup>23</sup>

There is still a major need to explore much more deeply what all this may mean in terms of an alternative organisation of production, fighting privatisation and market penetration and working towards an alternative science and technology. Also, the political force to carry out such a struggle needs to be identified much more since the change cannot be an outcome of state planning or of the struggles of the women's movement alone. But the direction seems to emerge more clearly as being one of needs *vs.* wants, struggle against privatisation of resources, resisting market penetration, discovery of alternative technologies, resisting market penetration, discovery of alternative technologies, resisting consumerism and capitalist values, upholding production and sustenance of life and working on decentralisation of production, circulation and consumption and resisting both the want circuit and unlimited growth.

There still needs to be a reflection on the commonalities and differences between the systematic perpetuation of poverty and the systematic promotion of patriarchy because both aspects are not just identical, their relationship can be complicated and thus confusing. Bina Agarwal has done indepth studies of rural development and the way in which women have been affected by it. Some of her conclusions are quite straightforward and simple, e.g. she shows clearly and unambiguously that women's access to land, not mediated by male members of the household, is a crucial aspect in determining their status. Such customary rights have been systematically eroded with increasing privatisation and marketisation and there has been an interplay between customary controls over women, aided by violence, and state policies systematically abolishing matriliney and matrilocality.<sup>24</sup>



Bina Agarwal has also drawn attention to the more complicated facts of intra-household discrimination against women and the factors which contribute to this.<sup>25</sup> Such discrimination, related to food intake, access to health care and levels of violence, has shown to be related on the one hand with certain customary factors (e.g. hypergamous long distance marriages in North-West India *vs.* marriage within the kinship group in South India), and with Female Labour Participation (FLP) as well as marriage costs. Interestingly, she also raises the question here of the worth (value) of a women's work depending on the realised economic contribution to the household income, e.g. if underemployment is high or wage differentials are wide, women are at a disadvantage. She also points to a difference in work contribution in so far as male members are more clearly "earning" while girls often are "collecting" (cowdung, paddy after harvest, firewood, etc.).<sup>26</sup>

Within the above framework she thus points to the problem that women's work is not valued because they expend their labour on direct creation of use values (N-circuit) while men are more clearly integrated in the cash-economy which is linked up with profit (W-circuit). She also points out that due to intra-household discrimination, there are women below the poverty line in households which are counted to be above it and men above the poverty line in households which are counted to be below it. She clearly shows that intra-household discrimination operates even where "development" succeeds. She refutes the "trickle" down theory both with respect to removal of poverty as with respect to women's development. She clearly shows that women are still gravely disadvantaged, especially in the North-Western States of India where absolute poverty levels have been lowered, while they are a bit better off in the Eastern States where poverty levels are higher. She shows this disadvantage as a continuation of traditional anti-women attitudes and green revolution policies (women having less access to land and work, high wage differentials etc.). She also notes that women's more egalitarian position in the Southern States is threatened by technologies like mechanisation of transplanting and weeding.<sup>27</sup>

While such studies are extremely valuable in showing the complexity of the situation, they may lend themselves also to certain short-circuits in terms of conclusions if not carefully read. For example, one may be tempted to think that by access to more work, lower wage differentials, and more integration in the money

economy, women's problems can be solved, together perhaps with some cultural campaigning against dowry, levels of violence etc. The overall problem of need based production *vs.* want based production does not come into full focus here. This may have an impact on formulation of demands which may try to find a shortcut to the improvement of women's position by making them more equal to men in terms of integration into the cash economy (and thus basically the W-circuit).

### *The Ecological Dimensions or Access to Resources*

While it is not possible to take up the ecological dimension in depth, it is necessary to draw attention to some crucial linkages.

1. Environmental destruction is the key issue in the question of access to resources. Access to resources without rescuing the environment is an unfeasible proposition.

2. It is necessary to acknowledge that destruction of the environment is rooted in precisely those development concepts which have perpetuated poverty and marginalised women. This has amply been demonstrated by research on single issues like the firewood crisis.<sup>28</sup> It has also been shown in the more comprehensive studies which link the issues of forest, water, soil with a fundamental critique of the underlying concepts of science and technology.<sup>29</sup>

3. The struggle against privatisation, marketisation and a destructive science and technology is at the heart of the attempt to create and preserve a liveable environment.

4. Delinking the N-circuit, i.e. production for basic human needs, from the W-circuit, i.e. production for profit and unlimited growth, is vitally necessary if human survival and survival of nature is to be safeguarded.

5. One of the crucial reasons why little headway has been made in progressing from the "basic needs" approach to a more "holistic" approach is neglect of the ecological aspect and lack of strategies to curtail the W-circuit and to strengthen the N-circuit.

6. This failure has one of its root causes in the sexual division of labour. Women in the informal sector have at great social cost upheld the crumbling N-circuit while environmental planning has largely been done by men whose preoccupation it is to make resources available for the W-circuit.

7. It is therefore the responsibility of the women's movement to apply much more of our energies to systematic planning for a



sustainable environment and for a need oriented production process. We have to make demands on the state to make resources available for experiments in this field and at the same time to curtail the often highly subsidised exploitation of resources by big industries.

It appears that unless we develop an understanding of these underlying linkages at much greater depth, the critique of the women's movement of governmental policies remains without teeth. For example, the NPP critique criticises displacement of women in industries by saying that on the one hand government's officially declared policy is to introduce science and technology to achieve the goal of modernisation and to accelerate the development process. On the other hand, the way in which this policy is implemented leads to the displacement of women on a large scale from their present occupations and their exclusion from this development process.<sup>30</sup> In reality there is no contradiction in this state of affairs since science and technology as it is, is integral to a development concept which perpetuates poverty and marginalises women. It is therefore also not enough to make demands on the government to give women training in alternative skills for other jobs, particularly in the non-traditional sectors, as is repeatedly done in the NPP Critique.<sup>31</sup>

It has to be acknowledged that from the Sixth Plan onwards, major attempts have been made to work on women's development. Yet, most of these plans have focussed on the family unit and women as part of it and underlying development concepts have not been questioned in principle. We often succumb to the danger of asking for "more of the same" instead of attempting major rethinking. For example, if we only demand the expansion and provision of training opportunities for women in agriculture and agro-based industries and non-traditional occupations at the district level,<sup>32</sup> who will safeguard that such "opportunities" will not be given by firms like Pepsico which is attempting to reshape agriculture in the Punjab and to further destroy the environment in order to cater to the W-circuit of the so-called developed nations? It is not enough to criticize marginalisation of women by the Green Revolution unless we come up with sustainable agriculture policy proposals which undo also the whole environmental short circuit of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, overuse of irrigation, salinity, soil erosion etc.

Seen in this light, many of the demands of the NPP critique like

land reform, decentralisation and resource allocation remain too unspecific to become effective. There needs to be a new debate on the question of house and *pattas*, i.e. whether joint or for women only. Also, whether *pattas* could be given to organisations for collective use of land, without implying the individual's right to buy and sell, needs to be explored much more. One certainly agrees with the NPP Critique if it says that one has to get away from the household approach and focus more on organisations. Yet one only harbours profound doubts if the expectation is expressed that the government will set up groups which will take care of channeling funds and spelling out practical programmes.<sup>33</sup> It is obvious that without massive organisational activity and pressure of movements from the grass root level, nothing can be done.

Some of the recommendations of the NPP Critique on access to resources are indeed very much on the right track<sup>34</sup> like gearing water management to the needs of small holders, ensuring use of minor forest produce for the poor, and involvement of women. On the other hand the goal of need based production is not clearly formulated. Resources are also often seen as more access to credit and marketing which often leads only to further integration into the W-circuit. One needs to remember the observation of C.T. Kurien who says: "The basic principle of the want-based economy is the quest of the primary units to increase their resources, an ongoing chase to acquire still more resources."<sup>35</sup> This question of access of resources therefore cannot be discussed apart from the further questions of how access is achieved, whether it is individual or collective, whether it involves increasing marketisation or resistance to it, how resources are used and for what purposes.

Together with this we also need to apply our minds to the question of how to relate to the problem of the informal sector. In India, more than 90% of women workers are employed in this sector. It is also considered the field which is closer to the N-circuit while at the same time it gets more and more subsumed under the W-circuit.

The DAWN document observed: 'Women are much less likely than men to move out of 'informal' occupations, partly because they tend to be at the lower end of even the 'informal' spectrum and hence cannot accumulate the skills, networks, or cash reserves necessary to move out, and partly because the barriers erected by sexist ideology to their entry into better occupations tend to be quite formidable. The document also makes clear that this sector is



in fact crucial to the economy. It is important to recognise (and not only from women's perspective) that such employment cannot in any sense be considered marginal, since it tends to account for such a significant proportion of total employment. *Nor is it merely a residual or declining sector.* Many of its activities, particularly in urban services and trade, are a vitally important part of overall economic activity. Raising the productive capacity of this sector and improving its working conditions will simultaneously improve the living standards of the producers therein, as well as a large number of the urban workers and poor who consume the goods and services it creates.<sup>36</sup>

However, in actual fact, while the informal sector has seen a phenomenal growth over the past few years, working conditions are still deteriorating. The National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector points out in the Shram Shakti report: "The labour force in the unorganised sector is characterised by a high incidence of casual labour mostly doing intermittent jobs at extremely low wages or doing their own work at very uneconomical returns. There is a total lack of job security and social security benefits. The areas of exploitation are high resulting in long hours, unsatisfactory work conditions and occupational health hazards. The organised sector takes advantage of this vulnerable position of the labour force in the unorganised sector. Large industries now find it advantageous to decentralise production units of larger registered units."<sup>37</sup>

It is not possible to even tentatively enter into a debate on the informal sector here but we need to point out that the actual position is made difficult by the fact that governments have taken over the rhetoric of "strengthening the informal sector" as well as that of "holistic development", while at the same time aggressively promoting the W-circuit and in no way stemming the exploitation of the informal sector by the formal sector. "Mainstreaming" women remains a long term goal of this perspective.<sup>38</sup> In the short term, crude exploitation of women in the informal sector appears unavoidable.

It is for this reason that the NPP Critique comes down heavily on the emphasis on the employment streams of agriculture, dairy farming, cattle rearing, fishery, khadi, handloom, handicrafts and sericulture. The document says: "Without a change in agrarian policy, the marginalisation of the rural poor and of women in the first three cannot be stopped. Out of the rest it may be noted that

khadi, handloom and handicrafts are in severe crisis. The treatment of these as anti-poverty programmes and the orientation to export, leave the workers in these streams subject to retrenchment, low wages and middlemen. Further, the NPP thus carries forward an underlying ideology of women as supplementary earners and of job segregation by gender which will ensure that any training programmes for women in new skills, technology and sectors will not receive importance in implementation which it receives in words."<sup>39</sup>

The trend of this argument would be much more towards "upgrading" of women's skills for getting them out of the informal sector. There is also the problem that the NPP Critique in its rejection of the concept of women as "supplementary" earners only takes the line of demanding women's full and equal integration into so-called social production (wage labour). The Shram Shakti report on the other hand goes further in making *all* women's work, including household work and unpaid work visible and thus acknowledges women's need-based subsistence work as the basis of all other production. It comes closer to a need-based redefinition of productivity.

An important aspect which both the NPP Critique and the Shram Shakti report have in common is emphasis on decentralisation. Besides, there is a demand to move away from anti-poverty programmes and welfare programmes towards a sectoral approach which would include a women's component in all industrial and agricultural policies. This would also have to be enhanced by the aspect of need based production *vs.* want oriented production in all the different sectors.

Many of the recommendations of the Shram Shakti report go much more in the direction of expanding and protecting women's labour rights in the informal sector and curtailing the exploitation of the informal sector by the formal sector. The recommendations of this report need to be studied in greater depth by various women's organisations in the light of the availability of local resources and an analysis of local needs in order to make concrete demands for need-based production circuits at local levels.

### *Some Organisational Questions*

It has become obvious that the tasks ahead are absolutely stupendous. Problems of poverty, women's marginalisation and ecological destruction require nothing short of a total reorganisation of



production processes and value systems. Such re-organisation and even the debate on it are hampered considerably by the fact that all over South Asia we live in political systems with shrinking democratic spaces. Often, the middle classes are offered consumerism as a substitute for meaningful political participation and the poor have neither access to basic amenities of survival nor to structures of representation expressing their needs and aspirations. Yet the task of restructuring the economy and re-defining basic value systems is of a most pressing nature. It may be helpful to remember that this predicament is a worldwide problem. We are living at present at two major watersheds. The first one is the total crumbling of the power blocks which emerged after the second world war. The second one is the undoing of the industrial revolution of the last 200 years.

Looking at developments after the second world war, one can say that the socialist countries had on their own tried to arrive at a need-based production process by nationalisation of resources and state planning. However, being caught up in the arms race and in the world market, they not only employed capitalist science and technology but also subscribed to the same kind of growth concepts. Despite a high labour participation rate of women, patriarchy was relegated to a side contradiction and problems of sexual division of labour, violence and political participation of women could not fully be resolved.

The ecological destruction which went with this development was tremendous. The centralism of the economy and of political processes led not only to a denial of people's participation but also to a crisis in the accepted value system which has now erupted with full strength.

At the same time, the hollowness of capitalist development has manifested itself in a massive ecological crisis and a moral crisis in the Western world as well. It is this situation from which Maria Mies has started her analysis and which is also addressed by many voices in the peace movement and the ecological movement.<sup>40</sup> Large sections of the population are trying to opt out of the dominant development concept. Leninist answers to the question who will make the revolution are ever more difficult to uphold. New answers are difficult to find. The military blocs are also rapidly disintegrating. At the same time, class struggles and imperialist struggles for resources are bound to sharpen over the next decades. This has to do with the second watershed, the end of the

age of non-renewable resources.<sup>41</sup> This is valid for non-renewable energy resources as well as for fossil raw materials for industrial production. The battle of the N-circuit against the W-circuit will be a major confrontation over energy technologies and bio-resources, including bio-technology.

### *Important Movements*

Within this general backdrop, we can nevertheless identify different movements and campaigns which have tried to work along the lines of democratic collective access to resources, need based production *vs.* want based production, establishing alternative technology and marketing systems and creating a counter-culture. I will confine myself to a few examples from the Indian context.

1. The Chhatisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (CMSS) in Dalli Rajhara, a union in the captive mines of Bhilai Steel plant near Durg in Madhya Pradesh, has successfully fought against retrenchment and introduced intermediate technology which alleviates drudgery but is not labour saving. Women were in the forefront of these struggles and did not lose their work place, though at the all-India level, women's employment in mining has drastically declined. The CMSS has also expanded widely into the villages and built an ecological movement which has gone into alternative small dam building with government aid giving priority to irrigation of small holdings. Additionally, rediscovery and perfection of local skills and production with local materials for marketing in the area has also been encouraged (e.g. leather works, pottery, food production). Though the union regularly faces constantly severe repression, it has managed to inspire militant workers organisations in other towns as well.

2. The National Campaign for Housing Rights (NCHR) is vigorously working on an alternative housing bill and on an alternative housing policy. This campaign has raised the issues of land ceiling, land distribution, land and house *pattas* (for husband and wife, women only or also collective groups), access to resources and building materials. It is fighting for housing as a basic human right, to be integrated into the Constitution. Since women's right to housing will be at stake, it will have to be upheld against the religious personal laws which curtail women's right to property. Housing as a basic right is argued against housing as a market commodity. Recently, the NCHR has also linked up with the campaign for right to work which tries to make work a basic constitu-



tional right. Campaigns for an Employment Guarantee Act have been going on vigorously in various states, especially Karnataka, and many proposals in the bills which have been worked out are quite close to the attempt to reorganise production on N-circuits.

3. The campaign 'Protect Waters, Protect Life' led by the National Federation of Fish. Workers (NFF) which organised the Coastal March from Calcutta and Bombay respectively to Kanyakumari in April 1989, not only defended the rights of the artisanal fish-workers but also went into a thorough evaluation of ecological damage caused by what we call the W-circuit all along the coast. The campaign focussed on access to water for the poor and also took a strong stand against nuclear energy which probably contributed to the violent breaking up of the final public meeting on the 1st of May 1989 in Kanyakumari. Over three quarters of the massive crowds on that day (10-15 thousand) were women. The campaign has emphasized the priority of Article 21 (Right of Life) over Article 19 (Right to Profession).

4. The Chipko Movement in U.P. and the Appiko Movement in Karnataka have over the years highlighted the right of common people to preservation of forests, with women in the forefront. On a national scale, people's rights to the forest and their responsibility in decision making over it were expressed during the Western Ghats March.

5. *Pennurimai Iyakkam* (Movement for Womens' Rights) in Tamil Nadu has fought for slum dwellers' rights and especially women's housing rights. In the process, house *pattas* have been issued to women, sometimes not implying the right to sell. The organisation also fought for basic amenities as a human right, to be claimed without payment, and against marketisation of such amenities by the World Bank.

The list could be extended. What becomes obvious is that the women's movement cannot fight this struggle alone. It is a matter of alliance with ecological movements, unions in the unorganised sector and movements of Dalits and Adivasis. At the same time, it will also be essential to carry the women's perspective and the ecological dimension into the organised working class as well. The debate on needs *vs.* wants and the survival struggles of the poor and of women together with the ecological perspective need to be brought into the centre of any attempt to restructure society.

## NOTES

### CHAPTER II

1. Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India* (Vani Educational Books, Vikas Publishing House, 1984), pp. 86f, p. 131. Bipan Chandra insists on Gandhi being a clearly anti-communalist religious reformer despite his use of Hindu imagery, e.g. p. 156. See also p. 167: "It has been noted that the purely religious or theological content of communalism has tended to be rather meagre. The communalist seldom relied on theology and, in fact, actively avoided theological issues", *op. cit.* 167.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

3. *Saheli Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 1985, p. 6ff.

4. Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

5. See for example, Sankar Gose, *Political Ideas and Movements in India* (Allied Publishers, 1975), Chapter II: "Extremism and Militant Nationalism", especially his characterisation of Aurobindo's social outlook during his period of religious nationalism, p. 52.

6. "Gandhi and Women", Manushi Prakashan, 1986.

7. *Ibid.*

8. EPW, Vol. XX, No. 41, p. 1757.

9. For a comprehensive critique of the body-soul dichotomy in Gandhi, and its political implication, see M.M. Thomas, "Towards a redefinition of Gandhism" in *Ideological Quest within Christian Commitment 1939-1954* (CLS, Madras 1983), pp. 235-252.

10. For the following see Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahmin Movement in Western India, 1873 to 1930* (Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976), especially chapter 6.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

13. Joachim Alva, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

14. Motilal Banarasidass, 1st Edition 1938, reprinted 1962 and 1963.

15. University of Madras, 1976.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 23f.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

18. See, for example, Malik Ram Baveja, *Women in Islam* (The Institute of Indo-Middle East Cultural Studies, Agapura, Hyderabad, no year).



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19. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (SCM Press, 1983).

20. On this question of having to make choices between contradictory statements according to the criteria of broader humanitarian values see my paper "Perspectives of a Feminist Theology: Towards a Full Humanhood of Women and Men" in *Women's Image Making and Shaping* edited by Peter Fernando & Frances Yasas (Ishvani Kendra, Pune, 1985), pp. 123–148.

21. See e.g. the anthropological study of Susan S. Wadley (Ed.) *The Power of Tamil Women* (Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1980). This study remains very much at the surface of present day cultural expressions and takes many statements at face value in a naive way. See C.S. Lakshmi's critique "Up the Drumstick Tree" in *EPW*, Vol. XVII, No. 45, Nov. 6, '82.

22. A rich resource of temple myths has been assembled by David Dean Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1980).

23. "The 1984 Elections: United We Fall—Into the Trap of Manipulators", *Manushi*, No. 26 (Vol. 5, No. 2), Jan-Feb. 1985, pp. 2–9.

24. See her article mentioned in note 3.

25. See for example, his booklet, *Church and the Human Community* (ISPCK, Delhi, 1985).

26. See for example, his article, "Some Aspects of Liberation Theology in Islam" in *Negations* (Trivandrum), Nos. 6–8.

## CHAPTER III

1. For a full version see the PRIA brochure. *Learning for Health Care* (New Delhi, 1986).

2. *Lokayan Bulletin* 4/6 (Special Issue on the Women's Movement).

3. See Veena Das, "Notes on the Moral Foundation of the Debate on Abortion" in Diana L. Eck/Devaki Jain (Eds.), *Speaking of Faith: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women, Religion and Social Change* (Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1986), and Carol Gilligan: "A Different Voice in Moral Decisions" in the same book.

4. *New Internationalist*, April 1986.

## CHAPTER IV

1. The fact that the few women who have made it into the system as honorary men do not challenge prevalent policies, does not invalidate the general observation in the least. Rather, it emphasises the need for the women's movement and the development of women's consciousness.

2. Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Woman and the Subversion of the Community*, The Falling Wall Press, 1973.

3. "The Housewife and Her Labour Under Capitalism" in *New Left Review*, Jan-Feb. 1974, pp. 3-24.

4. *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

5. Paul Smith, "Domestic Labour and Marx's Theory of Value" in Annette Kuhn and Ann Marie Wolpe (eds), *Feminism and Materialism—Women and Modes of Production*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 189-219.

6. Paul Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 202. He quotes here K. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part I, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1969, p. 407.

7. Such a position is taken by Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, "Subsistence Production and Extended Reproduction" in Kate Young, Carol Wolkowitz and Roslyn McCullagh, *Of Marriage and the Market*, pp. 16-29.

8. Jean Gardiner, "Women's Domestic Labour" in *New Left Review*, Jan-Feb. 1975, pp. 47-58.

9. Usha Menon, "Women and Household Labour", *Social Scientist*, 110.

10. Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, *op. cit.*, p. 20. Usha Menon rejects Bennholdt-Thomsen's position on the ground of the time-lag involved in the process (*op. cit.* p. 34). She, on the whole, goes along with the points made by Paul Smith in characterising housework as incapable of being characterised as abstract and socially necessary.

11. Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

13. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p. 537. Emphasis mine.

14. Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

15. Paul Smith, *op. cit.*

16. See note 7.

17. See for example the survey on the lengthening of the working day due to the negative effects of the "social forestry" policies. D. Nagbrahman Shreekanth Sambrani, "Women's Drudgery in Firewood Collection" in *EPW*, Vol. XVIII Nos. 1 & 2, Jan. 1-8, 1983, pp. 33-38.

18. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Pelican Books, 1973, pp. 81-111.

19. The discussion has been summarised by Chhaya Datar in her thesis *Redefining Exploitation* (I.S.R.E., Bombay, 1982) where she extensively uses Claudia von Werlhof's paper "Women's Work: The Blindspot in the Critique of Political Economy" which was read at the Bielefeld Women's Research Conference, 1979. The paper has been made available by the Feminist Resource Centre, Bombay in cyclostyled form but I am not aware where it may have been published in the meantime.

20. "Subsistence production includes work related to pregnancy, childbirth, nursing and education of children, as well as that required in the production and transformation of food, clothing, housing, and the physical and psychological demands associated with sexuality" Bennholdt-Thomsen, *op. cit.*, p. 17.



21. Bennholdt-Thomsen, *ibid.*, p. 19f.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
24. *Op. cit.* (see note 7 above), p. 215.
25. Smith, p. 212 and Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
26. For the distinction between formal and real subsumption see *Capital* Vol. I (Penguin Edition), 1976, Appendix pp. 1019ff.
27. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1951, p. 289.
28. *Op. cit.*, p. 24.
29. Daniel Thorner: "A Post Marxian Theory of Peasant Economy: The School of A.V. Chayanow", in *The Shaping of Modern India*, Allied Publishers, Delhi, 1980, pp. 325-338.
30. The term "housewifisation" has been coined by Maria Mies.
31. Bennholdt-Thomsen, *op. cit.* 27.
32. See *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter XXVI.
33. See Datar, p. 68.
34. Joan Smith, "Women's Oppression and Male Alienation" in *International Socialism*, Winter 78/79 Series 2, No. 3, pp. 38-50.
35. Chhaya Datar, *op. cit.* p. 65.
36. "Patriarchy and Relations of Production" in Aunnetee Kuhn/ Ann Morie Wolpe (eds), *Feminism and Materialism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 11-41.
37. For a more detailed discussion of certain inconsistencies in Engel's approach, see my article, "Women and Household Labour" in *Social Scientist* 117.
38. "Previously, the workman sold his own labour-power, which he disposed of nominally as a free agent. Now he sells wife and child. He has become a slave dealer." (*Capital* Vol. I, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p. 373f.)
39. See for example *The German Ideology*, Marx, Engels, *Collected Works* Vol. 5 (Progress Publishers, Moscow), p. 43. This term has been worked out in detail by Maria Mies and the concept is discussed in detail in Chhaya Datar's thesis.
40. See Chhaya Datar, *op. cit.*, pp. 72ff.
41. See for example the article on Beedi Workers of Nipani in *EPW*, Vol. XIII, No. 28 and 29, or Maria Mies' study on "Dynamics of Sexual division of Labour and Capital Accumulation: Women Lace Workers of Narspaur" in *EPW* Annual Number, March 1981, pp. 387-500, and Devaki Jain's *Women's Quest for Power*, Vikas Publications, 1980.
42. See for example, Leela Gulati's findings in *Profiles in Female Poverty*, Hindustan Publishing Corporation, Delhi 1981 and also the survey on agricultural labourers by Jaon P. Mencher and K. Saradomani, "Muddy Feet, Dirty Hands—Rice Production and Female Agricultural Labour" in *EPW*, Vol. XVII, No. 52, Dec. 25, 1982, pp. A-149-A-16.
43. Sweden is one of the few exceptions where there exists a law which

covers the crime of marital rape, which is not thought to be an offence in most other countries.

44. *The German Ideology*, Marx/Engels *op. cit.*

45. *Ibid.* p. 43.

46. See for example, Roisin McDonough, Rachel Harrison, *op. cit.* p. 27ff and Bennholdt-Thomsen, *op. cit.*, p. 17. See also Chhaya Datar 'Summary of Disbedate', *op. cit.*, Chapter, IV & V.

47. *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

48. *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. In the following, I am drawing largely on the paper of Maria Mies, "Social Origins of Sexual Division of Labour", occasional paper No. 85, ISS (The Hague 1981), and Chhaya Datar's discussion of the same in Chapter V of her thesis.

52. Mies makes the point that "surplus" did not mean production above the basic needs but appropriation by force of someone else's production from the very beginning.

53. Datar, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

54. On this aspect, see Renu Chakravathy's book, *Communists in Indian Women's Movement*, PPH, New Delhi 1980, and also the very perceptive review of the same by Malini Bhattacharya in *EPW*, Vol. XVII No. 1 & 2, Jan. 2-9, 1982, pp. 20-22.

## CHAPTER V

1. I have been using the paper cuttings of IDLM and of the Dalit Documentation Centre as well as cyclostyled materials of an independent investigation team and of Dalit organisations which intervened in the matter. See also the report by S. Ganeshram in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2 December 1989, pp. 2640-2642; *Junior Vikatan*, Vol. 7-39, 27.9.1989; *Therasu*, 26.9.1989. I am also indebted to Ruth Manorama of Women's Voice, Bangalore, who had investigated the matter.

2. *EPW*, 2 December 1989, p. 2640.

3. For covering this issue, apart from the paper cuttings of IDLM and Dalit Documentation Centre, I have drawn on oral accounts of Ms. Rajini of IDLM, my colleagues in Pennurimai Iyakkam, and Mr. John Jayakaran, a Dalit activist with a deep commitment to women's issues. See also *Junior Vikatan*, 8-36, 5.9.1990.

4. *Indian Express*, Bangalore Edn., 7.4.1986.

5. Due to distance and lack of time a deeper investigation of these two cases was not possible. This account is only based on a brief record of Ms. Burnad Fatima, SRED, Arakkonam, who is involved with the Rural Women's Liberation Movement.



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6. Joanna Liddle, Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence*, Kali for Women, New Delhi 1986.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

9. *ibid.*, p. 64

10. See Romila Thapar, "Which of Us are Aryans," in *Seminar*, No. 364, December, 1989.

11. Dr. Baba Sahib Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. VII, "Who were the Shudras?" esp. pp. 78ff. Ambedkar's writings are strikingly close to the recent research of Morton Klass. See Note 21.

12. Robert Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamil Nadu—The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1969, pp. 56–66.

13. Ruth Manorama, "Dalit Women; The Thrice Alienated" in M.E. Prabhakar (ed), *Towards a Dalit Theology*, CISRS, Bangalore, 1988, and "The Plight and Uplift of Dalit Women" (unpublished manuscript).

14. "Dalit Women—Society's Firewood," in M.E. Prabhakar, *Towards a Dalit Theology*, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

15. Kalpana Kannabiran, "Reconstructing Patriarchy" cyclostyled version, Shakti Reproduction Series: Feminist Theory—Paper 7. I am not aware whether and where this paper may have been published.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

17. Nripendra Kumar Dutt, *Origin and Growth of Caste in India*, Vol. I Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1968.

18. Quoted by Kalpana Kannabiran (see above note 15) p. 2.

19. "Reconstituting Patriarchy," *op. cit.*, p. 11.

20. See Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, 1986.

21. Morton Klass, *Caste—The Emergence of the South Asian Social System*, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1980.

22. Gail Omvedt, Review essay on Morton Klass: "The Emergence of the South Asian Social System," (review essay on Morton Klass) in "Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars," Vol. 14, No. 2, April-June 1982.

23. See Nasir Tyabji, "Dravidian Notions of History" in *Seminar*, No. 364, December 1989.

24. "Castes in India" in *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. I, p. 11 (Govt. of Maharashtra 1989).

25. Vol. I, p. 8.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 18f.

28. "Annihilation of Caste," in Dr. Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. I, p. 47.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 48f.

30. Morton Klass, *Caste*, *op. cit.*, p. 106f.

31. For Ambedkar's involvement with workers see Dhanajay Keer, Dr.

Ambedkar, *Life and Mission*, Bombay, 1954, p. 300.

32. "The Untouchables: Who Are They and Why They Became Untouchables," *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 7, p. 272.

## CHAPTER VI

1. See Anil Agarwal/Sunita Narain, *The State of India's Environment: A Second Citizens' Report* (Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, 1985).

2. See, for example, the documentation on the anti-Sikh riots in Nov. 84 in Delhi carried by *Manushi*, No. 25, and the debate on personal laws documented in A.R. Desai (ed.), *Women's Liberation and Politics of Religious and Personal Laws in India*, C.G. Shah Memorial Trust Publication (16), Bombay,

3. In the field of ecology, this question has been raised powerfully by Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* fully by Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1988). As far as the cultural debate is concerned, a vigorous discussion is going on in the women's movement. See the interview with Romila Thapar, "Traditions Versus Misconceptions" in *Manushi*, No. 42-43, Sept-Dec. 1987. See also *Seminar*, No. 342, Feb. 1988 on *sati*, and chapter 2 of this book.

4. This is particularly true of Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (Zed Books, London, 1986). Vandana Shiva in *Staying Alive* has dealt with questions of spirituality and religion implicitly but has not related them to the overall situation of rising communalism.

5. See Ashish Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Oxford University Press, 1983); Ashish Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

6. Ashish Nandy, "Anti-Secular Manifesto", in *Seminar*, 314, Oct. 1985. Ashish Nandy, "The Human Factor", in *Illustrated Weekly*, Jan. 17-23, 1988, pp. 20-23. For a feminist critique of Nandy see Kumkum Sangari, "Perpetuating the Myth" in *Seminar*, 342, Feb. 1988, pp. 24-30 and Sujata Patel/Krishna Kumar, "Defenders of Sati" in *EPW*, Vol. XXIII, (4) Jan. 28th, 1988.

7. See notes 3 and 4 above.

8. At this point I agree with Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India* (Vikas, Delhi, 1984), though I would feel that his definition of communalism as ideology and "false consciousness" does underestimate the material reality of threat to life and livelihood, often enough across class lines, in the situation of communal clashes.

9. An analysis of such statements can be found in Ish Narain Misra, "The Women's Question in Communal Ideologies: A Study of the Ideologies of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh & Jamat-e-Islami" in *Teach-*



*ing Politics*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, 1987.

10. For example, Jurgen Habermass, *Science and Technology as Ideology* (German), Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1968.

11. Bastiaan Wielenga, *A History of the Working Class Movement* (ISI, Bangalore, 1978).

12. E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (Merlin Press, London, 1977).

13. Most recently in *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, especially the chapters "The Traditions of Technology" and "Science, Authoritarianism and Culture. On the Scope and Limits of Isolation Outside the Clinic".

14. D.D. Kosambi, *Science, Society and Peace* (Academy of Political and Social Studies, Pune 1986), collected from publications in various journals.

15. Claude Alvares, *Homo Faber: Technology and Culture in India, China and the West 1500-1975*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1979.

16. For example, studies like Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature—Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, Wildwood House, London, 1980. Evelyn F. Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985. Susan Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, Cornwall University Press, Ithaca, 1986.

17. Maria Mies, *op. cit.*, Carolyn Merchant, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5.

18. *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, 1986.

19. See the mimeographed statement of the Kerala section of SWGM distributed at the final meeting at Panaji, Goa, circulated by SAHYADRI, 16 Vanchi Lodge, Trichur-21.

20. *Illustrated Weekly*, May 1-7, 1988, pp. 26-29. But see also Swami Agnivesh's critique in the same issue, pp. 30-33.

21. More detailed references can be found in my earlier article mentioned in note 1.

22. See for example, "Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi" in *At the Edge of Psychology*, Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 70-98; also "From Outside the Imperium" in *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, pp. 127-162.

23. This debate is partly summarised in "Women and Work—A Marxist Perspective" found in this volume.

24. Vandana Shiva, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

25. Karl Marx, *Selected Works* (in three volumes), Vol. III (Moscow 1970), p. 13.

26. Edward C. Whitmont, *Return of the Spouse Goddess*, Archana Paperbacks, 1987.

27. Lynn E. Gatewood, *Devi and the Spouse Goddess*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1985.

28. David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*, Oxford University Press, 1987.

29. For the educated urbanised middle class character of the defenders of the Deorala *sati* and the commercial aspects of it see Madhu Kishwar,

Ruth Vanita, "The Burning of Roop Kanwar" and Prahlad Singh Shekawat "The Culture of Sati in Rajasthan" in *Manushi*, No. 42-43, 1987, pp. 15-25 and 30-34.

30. Jeremy Rifkin with Ted Howard, *Entropy: A New World View*. Afterword by Dr. Nicholas Georgescu Roegen, Bantam Books, New York, 1981. For further reading see Nicholas Georgescu Roegen, *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1971. Nicholas Georgescu Roegen, *Entropy and Economic Myths*, Pergamon Press, N.Y. 1977. Roger Garaudy, *Appel aux Vivants*, Seuil, Paris, 1979. Juan Martine-Alier, *Ecological Economics: Energy, Environment and Society*, Basil Blackwell, 1987.

32. Rifkin, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

33. "Doubts over safety of atomic reactors dispelled", in *Indian Express*, Madurai, Oct. 29, 1988, p. 7. "Vice Chancellor of the Madras University, Dr. A. Gnanam, said India had one of the lowest per capita energy production of 209 kw equivalent of coal, compared to 693 kw in China, 5362 kw in UK in 11,625 kw in USA. Under the present circumstances nuclear energy seemed to be a major resource for augmenting power production."

34. Cf. Note. 1.

35. M. Klass, *Caste: The Emergence of the South Asian Social System*, *op. cit.*

36. M. Klass, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

37. Maria Mies, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5.

38. Klass, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Vikas Publications, 1970), pp. 47ff.

41. A more detailed understanding of this position can be derived from Vasanti Raman, "Communalism and the Threat to Diversity" in *EPW*, Vol. XXII, No. 5, Jan. 31, 1987, pp. 174-176.

42. David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Goddess*, p. 10.

## CHAPTER VII

1. C.T. Kurien, *Poverty, Planning, and Social Transformation*, Allied Publishers, 1978, p. 9.

2. C.T. Kurien, "Indian Society in the Late Eighties", *Mainstream*, May 14 and 21, 1983, pp. 1-11.

3. *Development, Crisis, and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspective*, New Delhi, 1985, henceforth quoted as DAWN, p. 21.

4. Dept. of Women and Child Development, New Delhi, 1988 p. 24ff. Henceforth quoted as NPP.

5. For a critique of this process see National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000): A Perspective from the Women's Movement, Report of a debate, 22-23 Aug. 1988, New Delhi. Henceforth quoted as NPP Critique.



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6. Bina Agarwal (ed), *Structures of Patriarchy, State Community and Household in Modernising Asia*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1988.
7. S.H. Venkataramani, 'Female Infanticide: Born to die', in *India Today*, June 15, 1986.
8. See DAWN, p. 31ff.
9. Diane Elson/Ruth Pearson, "The Subordination of Women and the Internationalisation of Factory Production" in Kate Young *et al.* (eds), *Marriage and the Market: Subordination of Women in International Perspective*, K.K. CSE Books, 1981.
10. Pasikit Phongoaich, "Two roads to the Factory: Industrialisation Strategies and Women's Employment in South-East Asia" in Bina Agarwal (ed), *op. cit.*
11. Devaki Jain with Nalini Singh and Malini Chand, *Women's Quest for Power: Five Indian Case Studies*, Vikas Publishing House, chapter 2.
12. C.T. Kurien, 1978, p. 126 (emphasis mine).
13. NPP Critique, p. 5.
14. See above notes 1 and 2.
15. Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, Zed Books, 1986.
16. C.T. Kurien, 1978, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
19. For these three factors and their capacity to perpetuate poverty see C.T. Kurien, 1983.
20. C.T. Kurien, 1987, p. 137.
21. *Ibid.*, 148.
22. See my paper on "Ecology and Women's Struggles" in *Social Action*, Vol. 38, Jan-Mar 1988, pp. 1-14.
23. See "Women, Ecology and Culture" in this book.
24. Bina Agarwal, "Who Sows? Who Reaps? Women and Land Rights in India," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, July 1988, pp. 531-581.
25. Bina Agarwal, "Women's Poverty and Agricultural Growth in India," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 4, July 1986.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
27. See also Bina Agarwal, "Neither Sustenance nor Sustainability. Agricultural Strategies, Ecological Degradation and Indian Women in Poverty," in *Structures of Patriarchy: State Community and Household in Modernising Asia*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 83-120.
28. Bina Agarwal, *Cold Hearths and Barren Slopes: The Woodfuel Crisis in the Third World*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1986.
29. Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1988.
30. NPP Critique, p. 57.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 64, and elsewhere.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 102 and 104.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

35. C.T. Kurien, 1978, p. 48.

36. DAWN document, p. 30f. (emphasis mine).

37. *Shram Shakti*, New Delhi 1988, p. 8f.

38. NPP, p. xviii, also pp. 25ff.

39. NPP Critique, p. 78f.

40. See e.g. Goldsmith, *The Great U-Turn in History*, Green Books, London, 1988.

41. For a history of energy use over the last 300 years see Jeremy Rifkin with Ted Howard, *Entropy, A New World View*, Bantam Books, New York, 1981.

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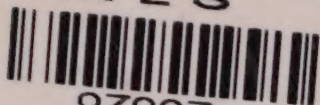
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